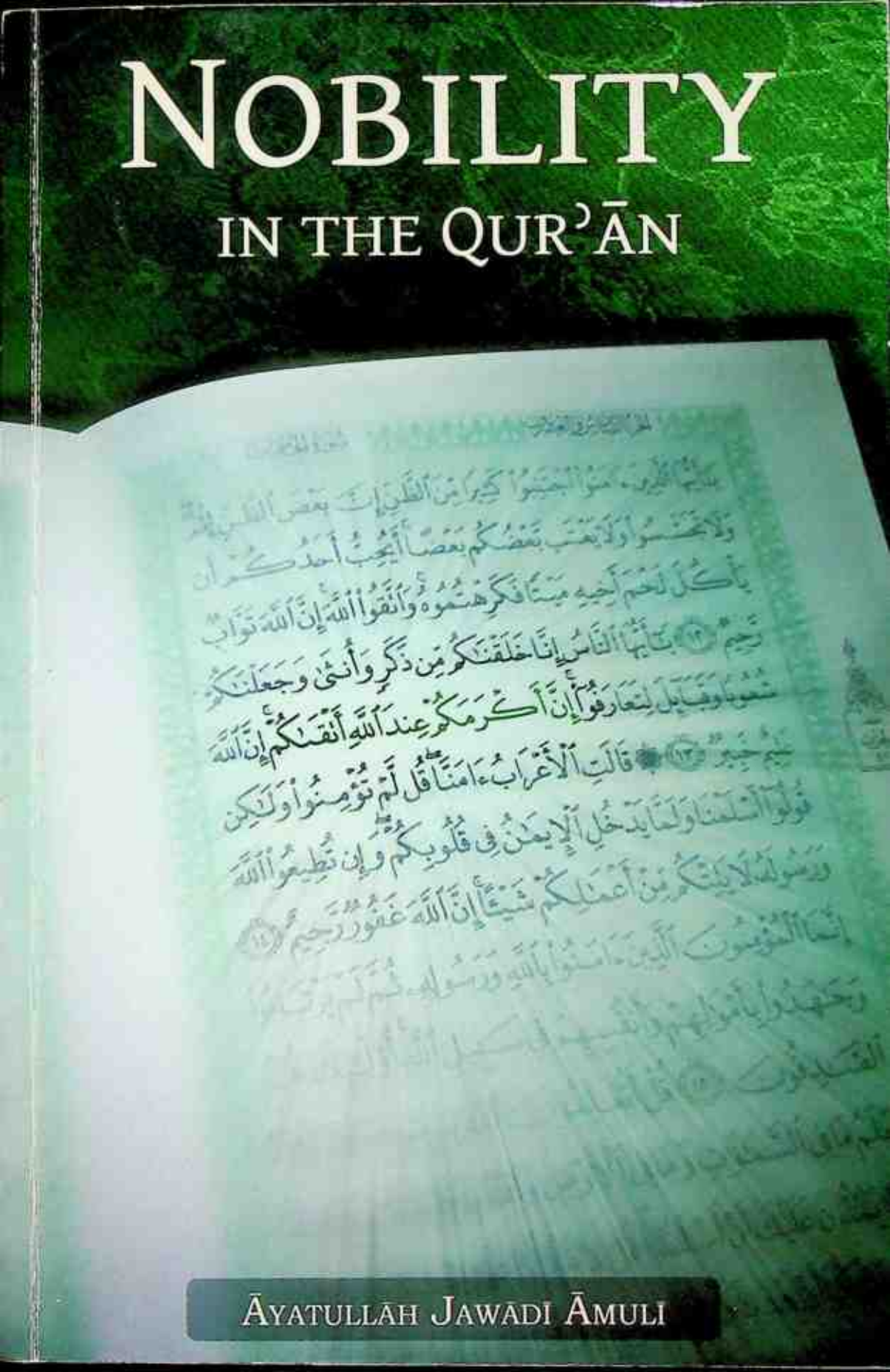
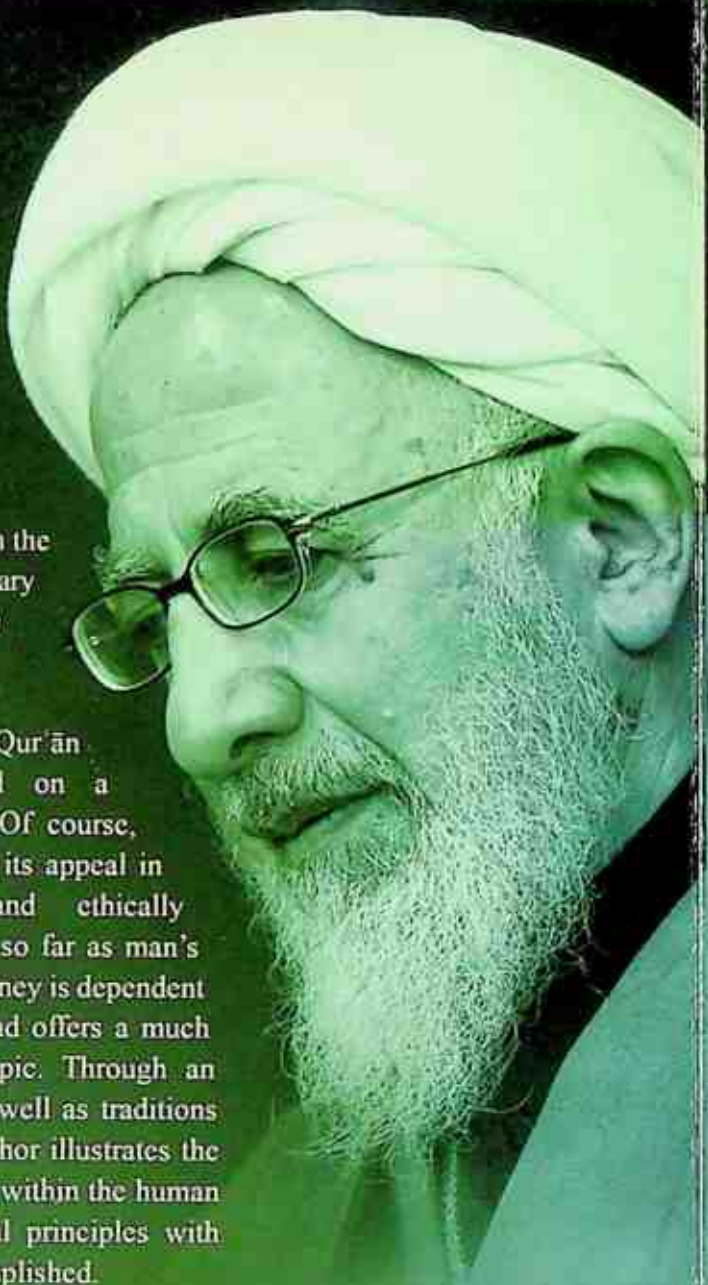
NOBILITY
IN THE QUR'ĀN



ĀYATULLĀH JAWĀDI ĀMULI



"Indeed the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-wary amongst you." (Qur'ān 49:13)

ABOUT THE BOOK

The nobility that the Qur'ān acknowledges is one based on a consciousness of the Divine. Of course, cultivating this virtue is losing its appeal in an increasingly secular and ethically relativistic world. However, in so far as man's ultimate fate on his spiritual journey is dependent on this quality, the book at hand offers a much needed examination of the topic. Through an analysis of Qur'ānic verses as well as traditions from the Infallibles ('a), the author illustrates the importance of instilling nobility within the human soul and outlines some general principles with regard to how this can be accomplished.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Āyatullāh 'Abdullāh Jawādī Āmulī, a veritable polymath who is acknowledged by his peers as a master in mysticism, philosophy, theology, jurisprudence and Qur'ānic exegesis, was born in 1933 in Āmul, Iran. He is renowned for his extensive writings in these fields as well as his attention to current affairs and appraisal of modern schools of thought.

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سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ
إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ
مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

NOBILITY
IN THE
QUR'ĀN

ĀYATULLĀH JAWĀDĪ ĀMULĪ

Translated by Shiraz Agha

Edited by Rizwan Rashid

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Foreword

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.

The subject matter of this book is *karāmah*. Like many other terms in Arabic, *karāmah* does not seem to have an exact equivalent in the English language. In this book, we have translated it as 'nobility' or 'honour'. It could have been translated as 'generosity' or 'magnanimity' as well. However, as the respected author explains in his preface, *karāmah* is primarily a mode of being which manifests itself in the human soul as an essential and inherent disposition (i.e., to be noble-hearted) as opposed to a relational or reciprocal attribute between two beings. The term 'nobility' seems to convey this idea more so than the term 'generosity'. At the same time, however, the reader should keep in mind that *karāmah* often manifests itself on the plane of the will in the form of generosity as an extension of the noble-hearted soul.

As for the term 'magnanimity', which is arguably a closer definition of the term *karāmah* and conveys both the idea of being an essential quality of the soul as well as a relational one, our decision to prefer the term 'nobility' over it is due to the relatively infrequent usage of the word 'magnanimity' in the English language. In contrast, the term *karāmah* and its derivatives are widely used in Arabic and Islamic literature.

This book, then, is about the concept of nobility from the perspective of the Qur'ān. As an existential perfection of the soul, and like all other such perfections, it is sourced in the Divine. Hence, one of the names of God is *al-Karīm*, the Noble.[i] However, the main focus of this book is not about the mental construct of nobility nor how it applies to God; rather, it is about the embodiment of nobility in the human soul. In effect, the book discusses the importance of becoming noble, for not only is man pre-disposed to do so by nature[ii], but as the author explains, the very goal for man's journey on earth is itself related

[i] "O man! What has deceived you about your Lord, *the Noble*." (Qur'ān 82:6).
[ii] "Certainly, We have *ennobled* the Children of Adam ..." (Qur'ān 17:70)

to nobility. The fact that God has described the divine scriptures[i], the angels that carry them, the Prophets (ᶜa) who explicate them[ii], and the month in which the greatest of scriptures was revealed[iii] with the quality of nobility, suggests that man's primary mandate is intimately tied to this virtue.

But how is man to become noble? Although it is true that every human being, by the sheer fact of being born human, has been honoured by God (with the potential to be noble), nonetheless, actualizing that potential is man's mandate in life, one which can only be accomplished through the quintessential virtue in Islam of *taqwā* or God-consciousness. Hence, the pivotal verse:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

Indeed the noblest of you with Allah is the most God-conscious among you. (49:13)

The present book, therefore, is just as much about God-consciousness as it is about nobility, for the two are inseparable. Moreover, in so far as God-consciousness is itself dependent on forming a correct vision of reality as well as extending this reality into the plane of the will, God-consciousness is inextricably tied to knowledge and action.

From the Islamic point of view, nobility presupposes not only hierarchy (for nobility implies magnanimity and is opposed to baseness) but also a gradation within this hierarchy. Hence, there are levels of nobility as there are levels of God-consciousness. The task then is for man to raise himself on the ladder of nobility by partaking in the divinely-sent revelations which inspire his intellect and inform his will.[iv]

---

[i] "No indeed! These [verses] are a reminder—so let anyone who wishes remember it—in *ennobled* (*mukarramah*) scriptures, exalted and purified, in the hands of envoys, *noble* (*kirām*) and pious." (Qurʾān 80:11-16)

[ii] "O Allah, O the one who conferred *nobility* on Muḥammad and his Household, and awarded them with messengership." ᶜAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyah*, prayer 4.

[iii] "This is a month, which You have dignified, *ennobled*, distinguished, and honoured over other months." Supplication after the obligatory prayers during the month of Ramaḍān.

[iv] "Make the Qurʾān a means for us to the most dignified stations of *nobility* and a ladder by which we may climb to the place of safety." ᶜAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Ibid.*, prayer 42.

From what has already been said, it should be clear that what it intended by nobility here is not the "nobility" that has historically presented itself in the form of a particular social class—whether in medieval Europe or elsewhere—composed primarily of wealthy proprietors enjoying certain hereditary privileges over the rest of society. This latter form of nobility is often associated with the aristocracy and is far from the Qur'ānic conception of it.

The difference between these two forms of 'nobility' can be summarized as follows: First, the Qur'ānic conception of nobility is not limited to any particular group of people or segment of society; rather, the potential lies latent within the soul of each and every individual for the sheer fact of having inherited something of God's spirit that was infused in the creation of man's prototype, Prophet Adam (*ʿa*).[i] Hence, each individual—regardless of race, gender, economic standing, or social class—is potentially noble through the very genesis of his creation. Second, actualizing this nobility is not based on lineage, wealth, power, or status; rather, it is the result of man's constant efforts and divine assistance in his path towards God. Third, the nobility that is the focus of this book is a nobility in the eyes of God, and not a nobility that is arbitrarily defined by humans through certain social conventions as is the case with the aristocratic version of it. Fourth, the Islamic form of nobility does not grant those who are noble any worldly privileges; in fact, those who are noble are precisely those who have freed themselves of worldly attachments and have focussed their attention on what is enduring with God. Finally, on the plane of action, this form of nobility is not so much about "possessing" as it is about "bestowing". It is about bestowing one's time, wealth, knowledge, possessions, life, etc. in the path of God. Hence, one of the greatest exemplars of nobility in Islamic history, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, could be seen digging wells and endowing them for the people without this impairing his nobility in the least; on the contrary, such acts of bestowal only increased the degree of his nobility.[ii]

---

[i] "So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him." (Qur'ān 38:72).

[ii] Similar to God's bestowal at the level of His acts: "The abundance of His giving does not increase anything but His generosity and nobility." Duʿā al-iftitāḥ in *Mafātiḥ al-jinān*.

This last point illustrates the fact that nobility is closely related to the idea of generosity, both of which are connoted by the term *karāmah* as alluded to earlier.

In today's climate of ethical relativism, it must be noted that from the Qur'ānic point of view, the qualities of God-consciousness and nobility are perennial virtues. They apply just as much in our times as they did in the past precisely because they have to do with human nature and the human soul. In so far as these pertain to the immaterial aspects of man's existence, cultivating them within the soul is of the utmost importance and relevance within the contemporary age.

It is for this reason that even though this work contains many theoretical and scholarly discussions on the topic at hand, it is also, undoubtedly, a book on ethics. Granted that a methodological guide towards nurturing nobility is not presented within the text, the book, nonetheless, has the effect of encouraging readers to work towards developing this disposition within the soul. As the author himself points out, knowledge is one of the main conditions for cultivating a nobility based on consciousness of the Divine, and this book provides a sufficient theoretical framework in order to pave the way for doing so.

Finally, a few words about the respected author of this work are in order. Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī was born in 1933 in Āmul, Iran. His father, Mīrzā Abū al-Ḥasan Jawādī was an eminent scholar and a respected clergyman in the city. His desire to learn Islamic sciences and theology led him to take up studies in the seminary of Āmul. In 1950, he migrated to Tehran to continue his higher level studies with prominent scholars, after which he migrated to Qom.

In Qom, he benefited from the grand Āyatullāh Burūjirdī's *khārij-i-fiqh* lectures for a period of time as well as Āyatullāh Muḥaqiq-dāmād and Āyatullāh Mīrzā Hāshim Āmulī. He attended Imam Khumaynī's lectures in *khārij-i uṣūl* for seven years. Because of his strong attraction for both the intellectual and Qur'ānic sciences, from the early days of his residence in Qom he came under the tutelage of the great philosopher and commentator of the Qur'ān, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and remained so until the end of the latter's life.

After the completion of these studies, Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī continued the tradition of the seminary by proliferating knowledge through his classes and books. Some of the books he has taught include: *Ishārāt, Sharḥ-i tajrīd, Sharḥ-i manẓūmah, Shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah, al-Taḥṣīl, Shifā'*, all of the *Asfār, Tamhīd al-qawā'id, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* and *Miṣbaḥ al-uns*. He currently teaches *khārij-i-fiqh*, the *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān, and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* in the seminary of Qom.

He has authored over a hundred volumes of books on subjects such as *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān, hagiography of the Prophet and his progeny, philosophy, *'irfān*, theology, religious law, social rights, religious teachings, and *ḥadīth*.

As for the present work, it is a translation of *Karāmah dar Qur'ān*[1] published in 1993 by Rajā Publications. It is largely a transcription of lectures delivered by the respected author over a period of twelve sessions. It also contains a written preface by the author on the topic of nobility. We would like to thank the translator, Shiraz Agha, for his excellent translation of the work and for introducing yet another work by the respected author to the English speaking community. We hope that this effort is accepted by the most noble Lord and becomes a means through which we can foster the disposition of nobility within ourselves and our respected communities.

Rizwan Rashid
10th Ramaḍān, 1437
Holy City of Qom

[1] Since most of the discussions in this book are based on verses of the noble Qur'ān, we have decided to retain the title, 'Nobility in the Qur'ān'. The author has also included passages from the *Nahj al-balāghah*, particularly near the end of the book, to support many of the ideas presented. However, in so far as the words and deeds of Imam 'Alī are nothing but an exposition and embodiment of the noble Qur'ān, they still fall within the general scope of 'nobility in the Qur'ān.'

Author's Preface

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful. Him alone to do we worship and from Him alone do we seek aid.

I

Nobility (*karāmah*) is a particular mode or aspect of existence. The most perfect referent of it is authenticated in God, the Sublime, who possesses the most exalted forms of existence, or rather, He is pure existence itself. Now since nobility is predicated both of the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) as well as of a contingent being (*mumkin al-wujūd*) in a univocal manner (*ishtirāk maʿnawī*) and not an equivocal one (*ishtirāk lafẓī*), it follows that nobility is not a quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and hence does not fall into any of the categories of quiddity.[1]

The reason for this is because anything that is specific to the Necessary Being, or is univocally common between the Necessary and the contingent, is immune from the trait of quiddity. Rather, nobility is a particular mental construct which is derived from a mode of existence and which can, therefore, be predicated of existence. Hence, like existence itself, nobility is free from being a quiddity. Of course, in some of its medial or lower degrees, quiddity may accompany nobility and combine with it. In this way, it is like the construct of knowledge which is essentially a mode of existence and hence devoid of quiddity. However, in its lower degree of being a psychic quality (*al-kayfiyyah al-nafsāniyyah*) or something similar, it is combined with quiddity.

The word *karīm* (noble or honourable) and other derivatives from the root verb *karuma* (to be noble, honourable) appear in the language of the Qurʾān and the Household (*ʿItrah*) in a univocal, and not equivocal manner. Examples from the Qurʾān, that pertain to God Almighty include:

فَإِنَّ رَبِّي غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ

... my Lord is indeed all-sufficient, all-noble. (27:40)

يا أَيُّهَا الإِنسانُ ما غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الكَرِيمِ

O man! What has deceived you about your Lord, the Noble (82:6)

اقرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الأَكرَمُ

Read, and your Lord is the most noble (96:3)

تَبارَكَ اسمُ رَبِّكَ ذِي الجَلالِ وَالإِكرامِ

Blessed is the Name of your Lord, the Possessor of Majesty and Nobility! (55:78)

Examples from the Prophetic Household (ᶜ*a*) include:

يا مَنْ لَهُ أَكْرَمُ الأَسْماءِ ... وَأَكْرَمُ مَنْ عَفى ... وَأَكْرَمُ الأَكْرَمِينَ

O He to whom belongs the most noble of names ... and the most-Noble of him who forgives ... and the most-Noble of the most noble.[i]

يا مَنْ لا يَفِدُ الْوافِدُونَ عَلى أَكْرَمَ مِنْهُ

O He upon whom the callers do not call that is more noble than Him[ii]

يَا أَكْرَمَ مَنِ اعْتَذَرَ إِلَيْهِ الْمُسِيئُونَ

O the most-Noble of the ones whom sinners seek repentance from.[iii]

II

The quality of nobility—like the qualities of *wilāyah* (proximity), *ghinā*ᵓ (self-sufficiency), and *shahādah* (witnessing)—is an essential quality (*waṣf nafsī*), the concomitant of which is to bestow upon others. As such it is not like the qualities of munificence, generosity, bestowal, and benefaction which are relational qualities (*waṣf nisbī*) where the *primary* purpose is to bestow upon others. For example, *shahādah*, which is an essential quality, can be equated with nobility but not necessarily

[i] Imam Ḥusayn ibn ᶜAlī, "Duᶜā ᶜArafah."
[ii] "The Whispered Prayers of the Petitioners" in *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*.
[iii] "The Whispered Prayers of Shaᶜbān."

generosity. Hence, in the *Ziyārah Arbaʿīn* of Imam Ḥusayn, the Master of the Martyrs (*sayyid al-shuhadā*), the following has come:

إِنِّي اشْهَدُ أَنَّهُ وَلِيُّكَ ... الْفائِزُ بِكَرامَتِكَ، أَكْرَمْتَهُ بِالشَّهادَةِ

I bear witness that he [Imam Ḥusayn] is Your *walī* (intimate) ... who was triumphant by means of Your nobility (*karāmah*), You ennobled him (*akramtahu*) with *shahādah*.

Of course, it is possible that in some of its forms and degrees, the act of ennobling (*ikrām* and *takrīm*) can be likened to generosity and benefaction. However, that which stands opposed to nobility is baseness and that which stands opposed to generosity is stinginess. Now, it is possible for a respectable man to be noble in the state of poverty and yet not be generous or charitable. This is because the noble-minded, who may be penniless at a particular time, is still noble, though he may not be described as generous or charitable at that moment [since he has nothing to offer then].

If *ikrām* or *takrīm* is used in the sense where one ennobles another soul, it does not completely correspond to the act of giving and bestowing:

وَجَعَلَنِي مِنَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ

... and made me one of the ennobled ones. (36:27)

In this verse, it is used in the sense of ennobling and honouring a man. At times, however, it means to grant a noble and valuable gift to someone such as in the supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ ... إِنَّكَ تُفِيدُ الْكَرِيمَةَ ، وَ تُعْطِي الْجَسِيمَةَ

O Allah ... Surely, You give the noble thing and You bestow the immense thing.[1]

In this prayer too it does not completely correspond to the idea of generosity, though the essence of generosity, of course, includes all of these instances.

In order to shed light on the difference between an essential quality and a relational quality, one can mention the following

[1] ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *al-Shaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, prayer 33.

two concepts as examples: (1) penetrative understanding in religion (*fiqāhah*) and (2) being the source of emulation for religious verdicts (*marjiᶜīyah*). The first is an essential quality of the soul while the second is a relational quality. Other examples include (1) intellective striving in religion (*ijtihād*) and (2) issuance of decrees (*iftāʾ*) or even (1) intellective striving and (2) leadership.

III

Nobility is like generosity, munificence, and benefaction in so far as it is related to the practical intellect (*ᶜaql ᶜamalī*). But in so far as it is related to the theoretical intellect (*ᶜaql naẓarī*), it is like understanding (*maᶜrifah*), cognizance (*dirāyah*), and witnessing (*shahādah*). Of course, it is possible that when considering a particular referent of nobility, one may find a concomitant relationship between the aspects of these two dimensions of the intellect, thereby causing one to occasionally mistake one for the other. However, after a thorough analysis of the matter, one will realize that there is a specific differentia that distinguishes each of these intellects from the other.

For example, the distinguishing attribute of prophecy is one of the most prominent instances of nobility. A man who has reached the station of prophecy has been blessed with an exclusive form of nobility. God, who has bestowed this status of prophecy on him, has in reality, ennobled him. This can be seen in what the Master of Martyrs, Imam Ḥusayn ibn ᶜAlī (ᶜa) says:

اللّٰهُمَّ إِنِّي أَحْمَدُكَ عَلى أَنْ أَكْرَمْتَنا بِالنُّبُوَّةِ، وَ عَلَّمْتَنَا الْقُرْآنِ، وَ فَقَّهْتَنا فِي الدِّينِ

O Allah, I praise You for ennobling us with prophecy, for teaching us the Qurʾān, and for making us deeply understand our religion.[1]

Now, prophecy carries with it both the perfection of action (like generosity) as well as the perfection of knowledge. Nonetheless, prophecy is not called munificence or generosity or

[1] "Duᶜā on the night of ᶜĀshūrā," as transmitted from Ṭabarī, v. 6, p. 238-239.

anything similar [because prophecy is not limited to the realm of action; rather, like nobility, it includes both].

Hence, for the reason that nobility [unlike generosity] includes the aspects related to the theoretical intellect—such as knowledge of the divine sciences—we find phrases such as the following in the various supplications and salutations:

اَللّٰهُمَّ ... وَ أَكْرِمني فيهِ بِإحضارِ المَسائِلِ

O Allah ... and ennoble me in it with the procurement of [intellectual] matters ...[i]

فَأَسْأَلُ اللهَ الَّذي أَكْرَمَني بِمَعْرِفَتِكُمْ وَمَعْرِفَةِ أَوْلِيائِكُمْ

So I ask Allah who ennobled me with awareness of you [Ahl al-Bayt] and awareness of your friends.[ii]

IV

Spiritual grace (*karāmah*), like the ability to perform miracles, is a quality of the soul for the divine saints. With this quality, the wayfarer is able to perform extraordinary feats. Qur'ānic examples include the following:

قالَ الَّذي عِندَهُ عِلمٌ مِنَ الكِتابِ أَنا آتيكَ بِهِ قَبلَ أَن يَرتَدَّ إِلَيكَ طَرفُكَ

The one who had knowledge of the Book said, 'I will bring it [i.e., the throne of the Queen of Sheba] to you in the twinkling of an eye'... (27:40)

كُلَّما دَخَلَ عَلَيها زَكَرِيَّا المِحرابَ وَجَدَ عِندَها رِزقًا قالَ يا مَريَمُ أَنّىٰ لَكِ هٰذا قالَت هُوَ مِن عِندِ اللَّـهِ إِنَّ اللَّـهَ يَرزُقُ مَن يَشاءُ بِغَيرِ حِسابٍ

... Whenever Zechariah visited her in the sanctuary, he would find provisions with her. He said, 'O Mary, from where does this come

[i] "Du'ā for the 28 day of the blessed month of Ramaḍān" in *Mafātiḥ al-jinān*.
[ii] Ziyārah 'Āshūrā.

for you?' She said, 'It comes from Allah. Allah provides whomever He wishes without any reckoning.' (3:37)

When such types of extraordinary abilities are attributed to those who are not prophets, it is technically called *karāmah*. The difference between it and the ability to perform miracles is that miracles are always accompanied by claims to prophecy in which case they function as proofs [to those who refute their prophecy]; spiritual grace (*karāmah*), however, is not accompanied with any such claim of prophecy.

In these types of cases [where one word applies to two ostensibly different meanings], it is true that it is not an instance of the semantic non-conditionality (*iṭlāq*) of the term 'nobility' nor does it have to do with the subtext (*mafhūm*) of the term. After all, the term *karāmah* when it means 'spiritual grace' is a technical term which has been accepted by lexicographers. The point, however, is that the term 'generosity' or 'munificence' or any other similar term cannot be applied to these kinds of extraordinary abilities [i.e., spiritual graces]; however, the term 'nobility' can apply to them. Moreover, the difference between the various denotations as well as the various referents that the one term *karāmah* contains [in these two cases] cannot be used to show that the term is an equivocal term with more than one meaning.[2]

V

In the same way that 'nobility' is a distinguished quality of the soul of a real person, it can also be a prominent quality of a conventional body or organization in which case it acts as an identity of that body's intellective and practical features. So, for example, it can become an attribute for a regime, in which case it sheds light on the particular political structure of that regime.

In other words, if the political structure of a government is based on the essentials of Islam and that structure becomes the protector of the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and the guarantor of implementing its rulings, then that government can be attributed with the quality of nobility. In fact, this is what

is intended in the Du'ā of Iftitāḥ that we read during the blessed month of Ramaḍān:

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنَّا نَرْغَبُ اِلَيْكَ فِي دَوْلَة كَرِيمَة تُعِزُّ بِهَا الاِسْلامَ وَاَهْلَهُ، وَتُذِلُّ بِهَا النِّفَاقَ وَاَهْلَهُ، وَتَجْعَلُنا فيها مِنَ الدُّعاةِ اِلى طاعَتِكَ، وَالْقادَةِ اِلى سَبيلِكَ، وَتَرْزُقُنا بِها كَرامَةَ الدُّنيا وَالاْخِرَةِ

O Allah, we earnestly desire from You a noble state, through which you strengthen Islam and its people and through which you degrade hypocrisy and its ilk. In it [i.e., this state] we ask that You make us the callers towards your obedience and the leaders to Your path. Through it, provide for us nobility in this world and in the Hereafter.

If the very waft and weave of a government is correct knowledge (*ʿilm ṣaḥīḥ*) and righteous action (*ʿamal ṣāliḥ*), it will actually have the power to honour the divine faith and dignify the followers of that faith. It will also pave the way in degrading hypocrisy and its followers. It will allow the prominent gnostics the possibility to call towards the Truth and to become the leaders who summon towards the divine presence. Ultimately, in its shade, it will be the source of man's nobility in this world and in the next.

Now, although it is possible for the terms 'generosity' and 'munificence' to be attributed to conventional bodies or organizations, nevertheless, its attribution is generally limited to the practical and executive level [and does not go beyond it].

VI

Nobility is a particular type of freedom (*ḥurriyyah*). In his lexical dictionary *Mufradāt*, Rāghib has quoted from other scholars that nobility is like freedom with the following difference: whereas freedom is sometimes attributed to small acts of kindness and sometimes to large acts of kindness, nobility, however, is only used for large acts of kindness. An example is a person who spends his wealth to equip an army in the way of God.

VII

Nobility has been extensively used in the eulogies that have been transmitted to us. It has been used for calling on God with the worthy names of Noble (*karīm*) or the most-Noble (*akram*), etc. It has also been utilized in terms of seeking a station of nobility and acquiring a noble companionship. What follows are examples of such usage:

حَمْداً نُعْتَقُ بِهِ مِنْ أَلِيمِ نَارِ اللَّهِ إِلَى كَرِيمِ جِوَارِ اللَّهِ ... فِي دَارِ
الْمُقَامَةِ الَّتِي لاَ تَزُولُ وَ مَحَلِّ كَرَامَتِهِ الَّتِي لاَ تَحُولُ

... a praise through which we may be released through Allah's painful fire and enter Allah's noble neighbourhood ... in an Abode of Permanence that will never end and the Place of His nobility that does not change.[i]

وَ صَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلاَةً تَزِيدُهُمْ كَرَامَةً عَلَى كَرَامَتِهِمْ

[O Allah] ... and bless them [i.e., the angels] with a blessing that will add to them nobility above their [own] nobility.[ii]

أَللَّهُمَّ يَامَنْ خَصَّ مُحَمَّداً وَآلَهُ بِالْكَرَامَةِ، وَحَبَاهُمْ بِالرِّسَالَةِ

O Allah, O the one who conferred nobility on Muḥammad and his Household, and awarded them with messengership.[iii]

وَ كَرِّمْنَا عَلَيْكَ

And grant us nobility with You.[iv]

وَ أَنَّ كَرَمَكَ لاَ يَضِيقُ عَنْ سُؤَالِ أَحَدٍ ... أَللَّهُمَّ ... وَ احْمِلْنِي بِكَرَمِكَ
عَلَى التَّفَضُّلِ ... إِنَّكَ وَاسِعٌ كَرِيمٌ

Your nobility is not constrained by anyone's asking ... O Allah ... take me through your nobility to Your gracious bounty ... truly, You are boundless and noble.[v]

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[i] ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Ibid.*, prayer 1.
[ii] *Ibid.*, prayer 3.
[iii] *Ibid.*, Ḥusaynī Irshād version, handwritten by ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥafiẓ Tabrīzī (famous 10th Century calligrapher), prayer 4.
[iv] ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyah*, prayer 5.
[v] *Ibid.*, prayer 13.

وَ أَصْلِحْنِي بِكَرَمِكَ

And rectify me with Your nobility.[i]

وَ أَكْرِمْنِي بِعَافِيَتِكَ

And ennoble me with Your well-being. [ii]

وَ لَوِّحْ مِنْهَا لِأَبْصَارِهِمْ مَا أَعْدَدْتَ فِيهَا مِنْ مَسَاكِنِ الْخُلْدِ وَ مَنَازِلِ الْكَرَامَةِ

And display to their sight [i.e., the people of the frontiers] that which You have prepared for them—the homes of everlastingness and the mansions of nobility.[iii]

وَ شَفِّعْ فِي خَطَايَايَ كَرَمَكَ وَ عُدْ عَلَى سَيِّئَاتِي بِعَفْوِكَ

Make Your nobility intercede for my offenses and follow up my evil deeds with Your pardon.[iv]

وَ عُدْ عَلَيَّ بِعَائِدَةِ رَحْمَتِكَ إِنَّكَ أَكْرَمُ الْمَسْئُولِينَ

And act kindly towards me with the kindly act of mercy. Truly, You are the most noble of those from whom are asked.[v]

فَسُبْحَانَكَ مَا أَبْيَنَ كَرَمَكَ فِي مُعَامَلَةِ مَنْ أَطَاعَكَ أَوْ عَصَاكَ

Immaculate are You. How manifest is Your nobility in dealing with one who obeys or disobeys You.[vi]

وَ أَفْرِشْنِي مِهَادَ كَرَامَتِكَ وَ أَوْرِدْنِي مَشَارِعَ رَحْمَتِكَ

Spread for me the bed of Your nobility and bring me to the watering holes of Your mercy.[vii]

وَ اجْعَلِ الْقُرْآنَ وَسِيلَةً لَنَا إِلَى أَشْرَفِ مَنَازِلِ الْكَرَامَةِ وَ سُلَّماً نَعْرُجُ فِيهِ إِلَى مَحَلِّ السَّلَامَةِ

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[i] *Ibid.*, prayer 20.
[ii] *Ibid.*, prayer 23.
[iii] *Ibid.*, prayer 27.
[iv] *Ibid.*, prayer 31.
[v] *Ibid.*, prayer 32.
[vi] *Ibid.*, prayer 37.
[vii] *Ibid.*, prayer 41.

Make the Qur'ān a means for us to the most dignified stations of nobility and a ladder by which we may climb to the place of safety.[i]

وَ بَصَّرْتَنَا الزُّلْفَةَ لَدَيْكَ وَ الْوُصُولَ إِلَى كَرَامَتِكَ ... إِنَّكَ أَكْرَمُ مَنْ رُغِبَ إِلَيْهِ

You have shown us proximity to You and arrival at Your nobility ... Surely, You are the most noble of those who are desired.[ii]

لِتَكُونَ حُجَّتُكَ أَبْلَغَ وَ كَرَمُكَ أَكْمَلَ وَ إِحْسَانُكَ أَوْفَى

[You guided me and bore patiently with me] ... so that Your argument be more conclusive, your nobility be more perfect, and Your beneficence more exhaustive.[iii]

وَ سُقْ كَرَائِمَ مَوَاهِبِكَ إِلَيَّ

Direct Your noble gifts to me.[iv]

Also, in the Whispered Prayer of the Month of Shaʿbān, which is one of the most distinguished eulogies that has been transmitted, one finds the following regarding the topic of nobility:

إِذِ الْعَفْوُ نَعْتٌ لِكَرَمِكَ ... فَشَكَرْتُكَ بِإِدْخَالِي فِي كَرَمِكَ ... وَلَا انْقَطَعَ رَجَائِي مِنْ جَمِيلِ كَرَمِكَ ... فَقَدْ نَبَّهَنِي الْيَقِينُ إِلَى كَرَمِ عَطْفِكَ

[I seek Your forgiveness] because forgiveness is an attribute of Your nobility ... so I thank You for entering me into Your nobility ... let not my hope become cut off from the beauty of Your nobility ... my certainty has awakened me from sleep regarding the nobility of Your affection.

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[i] *Ibid.*, prayer 42.
[ii] *Ibid.*, prayer 45.
[iii] *Ibid.*, prayer 46.
[iv] *Ibid.*, prayer 47.

VIII

Whenever nobility—like all the other virtues similar to it—projects itself on any place, it gives that place of projection the same name as itself. It becomes the source of the nobility of that place. An example is the day of ᶜArafah, which became the special vessel of divine mercy and nobility. As such, it became praised for its nobility. Imam ᶜAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn says:

اَللّٰهُمَّ هٰذَا يَوْمُ عَرَفَةَ يَوْمٌ شَرَّفْتَهُ وَ كَرَّمْتَهُ وَ عَظَّمْتَهُ، نَشَرْتَ فِيهِ رَحْمَتَكَ

O Allah, this Day of ᶜArafah is a day that You have distinguished, ennobled, dignified and spread Your mercy within it.[i]

The same is the case for the blessed month of Ramaḍān, of which it is said:

وَ هٰذا شَهْرٌ عَظَّمْتَهُ وَ كَرَّمْتَهُ وَ شَرَّفْتَهُ وَ فَضَّلْتَهُ عَلَى الشُّهُورِ

This is a month, which You have dignified, ennobled, distinguished, and honoured over other months.

In fact, Imam ᶜAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn says with regards to the passing of the blessed month of Ramaḍān:

اَلسَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا أَكْرَمَ مَصْحُوبٍ مِنَ الْأَوْقَاتِ

Peace be upon you, O the most noble of accompanying times.[ii]

Of course, the whole contingent world—which is a locus of the manifestation of God, the Noble—is affiliated with nobility. However, the exalted determination of the witnessing gnostic, though he witnesses the beauty of all manifestations, seeks to see the most noble of manifestations with the eyes of understanding. Hence, we find the following words [uttered by Imam Bāqir (ᶜa)] in the Dawn Supplication for the blessed month of Ramaḍān:

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[i] *Ibid.*, prayer 47.
[ii] *Ibid.*, prayer 45.

اَللّٰهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْئَلُكَ مِنْ آيَاتِكَ بِأَكْرَمِهَا، وَ كُلُّ آيَاتِكَ كَرِيمَةٌ. اَللّٰهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْئَلُكَ بِآيَاتِكَ كُلِّهَا

O God, truly, I ask you through the most noble from among Your signs, though all of Your signs are noble. O God, I ask you through Your signs, all of them.

Since the blessed month of Ramaḍān is the vessel in which nobility was revealed, many of the eulogies of this month pertains to acquiring nobility or noble companionship:

اَللّٰهُمَّ ارْزُقْنِي فِيهِ ... صُحْبَةَ الْكِرَامِ

O Allah, on this day, provide for me ... noble companionship.[1]

The same is the case for the month of Rajab which is affiliated with nobility in its own right. The following has appeared from the pen of the Imam of the Age (ᶜa), may our spirits be ransomed for him:

وَ بَارِكْ لَنَا فِي شَهْرِنَا هَذَا الْمُرَجَّبِ الْمُكَرَّمِ

And bless for us in our month, this month of Rajab, the ennobled one ...

To conclude, we ask God—who is the Source of all nobilities and to Him will they return—to help us all reach the lofty station of the nobility of the spirit, and also to preserve the Islamic establishment with nobility.

ᶜAbdullah Jawādi Āmulī
Qom, Rabīᶜ al-Awwal 5, 1408 / October 28, 1987

[1] "Duᶜā for the 8th day of the blessed month of Ramaḍān" in *Mafātiḥ al-jinān*.

Session One

I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan. In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful. All praise belongs to Allah who guided us to this point, and had He not guided us, we would not have been guided. May Allah bless all of the prophets, messengers, and guided leaders. With them do we associate, and from their enemies do we free ourselves [in our journey] towards Allah.

Even though one of the most important teachings of the noble Qur'ān pertains to the purification of the human soul, the topic that is the subject of our concern here and now is the nobility (*karāmah*) of the human being according to the noble Qur'ān. It is with this in mind that God Almighty extensively describes the creation and composition of man from spirit and body, the distinctions of the spirit's creation, and the nature of the relationship between the body and the spirit—for knowledge of these matters plays an effective role in man's ability to acquire nobility. Aside from technical matters, the main headings of our discussion will pertain to the following: What does nobility mean? How can man attain the station of nobility? What are the causes and factors that allow man to become noble (*karīm*)? What obstacles hinder man from acquiring this nobility? What does it mean when we say that some of God's saints have reached the station of nobility? What is the difference between a spiritual grace (*karāmah*, pl. *karāmāt*) and a miracle?[1] These and other dimensions related to the stations of the soul will also be discussed.

The Divine Spirit: the Source of Nobility

God has identified man as a noble species for He says in verse 70 of Surah Isrā':

وَلَقَد كَرَّمنا بَني آدَمَ

[1] The difference between the two has briefly been discussed in part IV of the Author's Preface. A more extensively discussion occurs in the first volume of his thematic exegesis *Qur'ān dar Qur'ān* (*The Qur'ān in Light of the Qur'ān*) under the chapter "Miraculousness of the Qur'ān." [Ed.]

Certainly, We have honoured/ennobled the Children of Adam ... (17:70)

This means that the human species has been essentially created with nobility. Moreover, as the continuation of the verse alludes to, he has the potential for acquiring additional nobility [over and above that which he possesses in the genesis of his creation]:

وَلَقَد كَرَّمنا بَني آدَمَ وَحَمَلناهُم فِي البَرِّ وَالبَحرِ وَرَزَقناهُم مِنَ الطَّيِّباتِ وَفَضَّلناهُم عَلىٰ كَثيرٍ مِمَّن خَلَقنا تَفضيلًا

Certainly We have honoured the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with a complete preference. (17:70)

At present, we do not wish to probe into whether man is superior to all beings of this universe or just to some of them. The beginning of the verse—"We have honoured the Children of Adam"—is concerned with the essential nobility of man, while the end of the verse—"and We have given them an advantage over many of those We have created"—concerns his relative nobility. Therefore, on the whole, we can say that God has identified man as a noble species.

After explaining the creation of man and how he was infused with the divine spirit, God says:

فَتَبارَكَ اللَّـهُ أَحسَنُ الخالِقينَ

So blessed is Allah, the best of creators! (23:14)

If God has commended Himself [with regard to the creation of man] then this is only on account of the divine spirit that man was infused with. If we do not take this into consideration, other animals are no different from man with respect to the additional aspects mentioned in the same verse—i.e., their transformation from a "drop of fluid" to a "clinging mass" to a "fleshy tissue" to an embryo, etc.[1] What differentiates man, however, and the

[1] The complete verse reads: "Then We created the drop of fluid as a clinging mass. Then We created the clinging mass as a fleshy tissue. Then We created the fleshy tissue as bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We

basis on which God attributes nobility to man is with respect to his knowledge and righteous deeds [which is on account of the spirit he is infused with]. Moreover, not all knowledge is implied here [as the source of nobility]; rather it is only that knowledge which is taught by God Himself and which God has invited mankind to learn.

The Noble God Teaches Nobility

According to a famous tradition, the first surah that was revealed to the blessed presence of the holy Prophet (ṣ) was Surah al-ʿAlaq. In it, God is mentioned as "the most Honourable" or "most-Noble" (*akram*). So man's teacher is the most-Noble God:

اقرَأ بِاسمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذي خَلَقَ خَلَقَ الإِنسانَ مِن عَلَقٍ اقرَأ
وَرَبُّكَ الأَكرَمُ الَّذي عَلَّمَ بِالقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الإِنسانَ ما لَم يَعلَم

Read in the Name of your Lord who created; created man from a clinging mass. Read, and your Lord is the most-Noble, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know. (96:1-5)

If an instructor is introduced with a specific trait then it is an indication that his instructions revolve around that particular trait. For example, if it is said that an engineer is conducting a class, this generally implies that he is teaching engineering. Likewise, if it is said that a doctor is in the middle of instructing, we can infer from this that what is being taught is related to the science of medicine. Therefore, if someone says that "the most-noble teacher is instructing," it would imply that he is conducting a class on nobility. When an assertion is qualified by an attribute, then [in our example] it determines the topic of instruction. Hence, when it is said, "Read, and your Lord is the most-Noble, who taught by the pen" (96:3-4), it means that God, who is the most-Noble, teaches a class of nobility by means of the pen and thereby makes man noble.

In so far as people of all nations (not just from the Islamic world) are human beings, they are students of the most-Noble God; and God, precisely because He is the most-Noble, is the

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produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (23:14).

instructor of all human beings. God instructs human beings on how they can become noble for that is what He desires—i.e., to make them noble. This "class" of instruction is not one that requires reading, writing, and arithmetic; in fact, it does not matter whether an individual can become an avid reader; he could be far removed from any formal studies. This is because when God becomes the teacher of man, He is able to inform him of truths not only from without—i.e., through his visual or auditory faculties—but also from within—i.e., through his own heart. Hence, it behoves man to become the apprentice of this most-Noble Instructor.

God makes certain human beings, such as the divine prophets, noble without any mediums while He allows others to attain this elevated station of nobility by means of these prophets. It is in this respect, that the holy Prophet has stated:

إنّما بُعِثْتُ لأتمِّمَ مَكارِمَ الأخْلاقِ

I have been delegated [as a prophet] to perfect noble ethical traits.[1]

It is as if he is saying: "God, who is the most-Noble, invited you to nobility. The prophets, who are the deputies of the Divine, have come to teach you nobility, while I—as the seal of them all—have been sent to perfect this nobility in you." This glorious chain of prophecy—which is the medium of divine effulgence and instruction—will, therefore, be noble by necessity. Since the various dimensions pertaining to the instruction of human beings must all partake of nobility, God has described the religious programs with the quality of being noble as He has done the same regarding those mandated to instruct human beings.

Nobility is the Spindle for Divine Instruction and Training

As we have mentioned, if it is said, "your instructor is the most-Noble God," it implies that the axis around which the instructions and training of the divine religion revolve is one of nobility. Therefore, if a person, after undergoing self-reflection with respect to his soul and its qualities, finds that he has not

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 16, p. 210.

yet reached the state of nobility, then he should know that he has been deficient as a student of the noble God. If, on the other hand, he finds that he has indeed attained a noble station, then he should be grateful for having become a good apprentice of the most-Noble God.

Since the realm of teaching nobility is free from all imperfection, God has praised all things that play a role in the training and instruction of man as being noble. For example, God has described the angels—who have been tasked to convey the most honourable message—as being noble servants. Likewise, he has remembered the prophets—who are the instructors of mankind—as being noble as well; He has called the scriptures that contain the religious programs of life as being 'ennobled scriptures' (*mukarramah*); and finally, He considers piety, which is the basis of religion, as the essence of nobility.

What is Nobility?

Nobility is the very absence of baseness and vileness. The noble one (*karīm*) is not to be confused with the eminent one (*kabīr*) or the exalted one (*ʿaẓīm*). The meaning of the term '*karīm*' probably does not have an exact equivalent in another language.[1] Therefore, if we wish to translate *karīm*, we have no choice but to define it using a number of words so that collectively, the meaning of the term can be grasped. *Karīm*, then, is the elevated soul that is free from all types of baseness. God considers the world, including all of its conventions, to be something that stands opposed to nobility and identifies it with the name '*dunyā*'; this is because '*danāwah*' (baseness) stands opposed to '*karāmah*' (nobility) and '*danī*' (the base) stands opposed to '*karīm*' (the noble).

Nobility and the Mundane World

Sometimes God refers to the world as '*adnā*' and other times He refers to it as '*dunyā*.' In other words, sometimes He uses the masculine form of the word (i.e., *adnā*) while at other times He uses the feminine form (i.e., *dunyā*). For example, He says:

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[1] See Foreword.

يَأْخُذونَ عَرَضَ هٰذَا الأَدنىٰ

... they grab the transitory gains of this lower world (adnā) ... (7:169)

or at other times, He says:

ذٰلِكَ مَتاعُ الحَياةِ الدُّنيا

... Those are the wares of the life of this world (dunyā) ... (3:14)

Nobility, therefore, is not to be found within the confines and conventions of this mundane world. Whatever carries the flavour of this world is definitely not the source of nobility; in fact, it is the root of baseness.

It is quite possible for an individual to purify himself from [the entanglements of] the world and thus not sully himself with the lowliness [that it threatens its admirers with]; at the same time, however, there is no guarantee that this person will achieve nobility. God, however, wishes that human beings achieve the station of the noble ones. In other words, He wants them to understand what baseness is and what factors lead to it. He also wants them to understand how they can save themselves from such things, and once they have saved themselves from imperfection, how they can go on to acquire perfection itself. After all, without reaching perfection, they cannot become noble. Simply saving oneself from imperfection does not make a man noble.

It is for this reason that God, who is free from all imperfections and who has complete possession of all existential perfections, introduces Himself as the 'most-Noble' when He says:

وَرَبُّكَ الأَكرَمُ الَّذي عَلَّمَ بِالقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الإِنسانَ ما لَم يَعلَم

... and your Lord is the most-Noble, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know (96:3-5)

It is this same God who has identified all things that prevent man from reaching Him as being "worldly" and having baseness. There is no room for nobility within the confines of the conventions of this world. In other words, it is not possible for the person who is infatuated with the world to achieve nobility.

If someone frees himself from the [love of] the world then he has only reached the negative attribute (*ṣifah al-salbī*) of being noble. Apart from this negative attribute—i.e., saving oneself and becoming free of the baseness of the natural world—the task of becoming noble also has an affirmative attribute (*ṣifah al-ījābī*)—i.e., obtaining the loftiness and elevation of what is beyond the natural world. Thus, it is possible for someone not to be base and not to be noble at the same time, since baseness and nobility are not contradictories of one another.[1] To be more precise, a person may only be deemed noble if on the one hand, he is not base, and on the other, his soul possesses a certain amount of loftiness.

It is for this reason that God has not only specified the boundaries of baseness and imperfection but also the heights to which the soul may ascend; stated differently, He has clarified the way by which we may free ourselves from the imperfections of this world and has also recounted the methods by which we may reach the perfection of what is beyond this world. Since there is no better instructor than God and since there is no textbook better than celestial revelation, God says: "He taught man that which he could not understand" (96:5).

The meaning of this verse is not that God has shown man something which he did not know before and which he could have learned if he wanted or if he exerted a certain amount of effort; rather, it means that God taught man something which would have been impossible (and *is* impossible) for him to learn *had it not been* for heavenly instructions.

Independence from Revelation is an Impossibility

Verse 151 of Surah al-Baqarah stands testament to this fact [of man's constant dependence for revelation]. It says the following when explaining the religious program of the holy Prophet:

[1] This is because the absence of one does not imply the presence of the other as is the case with all logical contradictories since it is not possible for two contradictories to be affirmed of a single subject or negated from it. [Ed.]

كَما أَرسَلنا فيكُم رَسولًا مِنكُم يَتلو عَلَيكُم آياتِنا
وَيُزَكّيكُم وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الكِتابَ وَالحِكمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم ما لَم
تَكونوا تَعلَمونَ

As We sent to you an Apostle from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, and purifies you, and teaches you the Book and wisdom, and teaches you what you did not know. (2:151)

The meaning of the last phrase of this verse is that the holy Prophet teaches you something that you human beings could not have learned on your own. It is not [testifying to the commonly held assumption] that if science and human knowledge progress, it would eventually reach a point where there is no further need for prophets. In fact, it is impossible for man, at any point in time (whether in the near or distant future), to be able to learn those things that the prophets taught him without recourse to their guidance and wisdom. Rather, the prophets (*ʿa*) teach man a wisdom that he would not have attained had it not been for them. It is precisely because of the blessings of the prophetic teachings that many ethical issues have been resolved, let alone matters pertaining to the Unseen (*ghayb*). If it were not for this heavenly dispensation, there would be no surety of the implementation of intellectual and ethical virtues.

The phrase "what you did not know" in the above verse in which the negative form of *kāna*[3] ("to be") has been utilized seeks to negate the very capability for independent and self-directed learning to take place, and not just the actuality of it. In other words, the prophets teach human beings that which not only do humans lack in actuality but which they do not even have the potential to learn on their own, independent of revelation.

If it were not for the prophets, many of the questions relating to the realms beyond the natural world (including creation and resurrection) would not have been answered such as the nature of heaven, hell, purgatory, etc. This is because these issues are neither experimental in nature nor do they resemble ordinary scientific matters that are within the grasp of man. It is not the case that man will understand them with the advancement of

technology and their relentless and incessant struggles [in science].

Impediments to Nobility: Rebelliousness

The correct method of instructing human beings on how they can become noble is to enumerate the impediments that prevent nobility from being actualized as well as its conditions and causes. It is for this reason that the most-Noble God first informs human beings regarding those factors that prevent nobility from emerging. This is so because until man saves himself from such impediments, he will never obtain the capability to participate in God's class on nobility.

At the very commencement of revelation, one of the first roadblocks to nobility was mentioned in the following way:

كَلَّا إِنَّ الإِنسانَ لَيَطغىٰ أَن رَآهُ استَغنىٰ

Indeed man becomes rebellious when he considers himself without need. (96:6-7)

The first hindrance to nobility is a sense of rebelliousness and insubordination before God (or to put it conversely, the first condition for partaking in nobility is surrender and submission to God). He who is defiant will never be given permission to take part in the school of nobility. Until and unless a person possesses a sense of dependency on God and feels that he is purely His slave, he will not be worthy enough to participate in such a school. If God is to make a man noble, then it is absolutely imperative that not a trace of defiance be found in him. This is the first impediment to nobility that must be removed. It can also be said that its converse [i.e., submission] is the first condition that must be obtained.

Impediments to Nobility: Worldly Pursuits

As we have seen, the noble Qur'ān has described God as being noble. It has also done so with regard to the angels who have been charged with the responsibility to record the actions of men:

يا أَيُّهَا الإِنسانُ ما غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الكَريمِ الَّذي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوّاكَ
فَعَدَلَكَ في أَيِّ صورَةٍ ما شاءَ رَكَّبَكَ كَلّا بَل تُكَذِّبونَ
بِالدّينِ وَإِنَّ عَلَيكُم لَحافِظينَ كِرامًا كاتِبينَ

O man! What has deceived you about your noble Lord, who created you and proportioned you, and gave you an upright nature, and composed you in any form that He wished? No indeed! Rather you deny the Retribution. Indeed, there are over you watchers, noble (kirām) writers (82:6-11)

The verse says that the angels, who are free from the [confines of] the material world, are noble. If you too wish to become noble, then you must embody this angelic attribute within yourself. God also mentions this fact [of being free from the material world] when the divine curriculum [for mankind] has been described. In verses 11-16 of the blessed Surah ʿAbasa, God says the following:

كَلّا إِنَّها تَذكِرَةٌ فَمَن شاءَ ذَكَرَهُ في صُحُفٍ مُكَرَّمَةٍ
مَرفوعَةٍ مُطَهَّرَةٍ بِأَيدي سَفَرَةٍ كِرامٍ بَرَرَةٍ

No indeed! These [verses] are a reminder—so let anyone who wishes remember it—in ennobled (mukarramah) scriptures, exalted and purified, in the hands of envoys, noble (kirām) and pious. (80:11-16)

In other words, Our curricula exist in noble books that are free from all sorts of imperfections. The beings that bring these matters to you are the angels who are, in turn, also free from deficiencies. This implies that the path by which revelation is taught to men is a noble one. If you are eager to participate in the class of nobility then you must also traverse this path.

The angels are noble delegates of God. If a delegate is noble, his mission will also be characterized by nobility. He will bring a noble message and this message will also possess the signs of nobility within it. If a delegate is praised with the quality of nobility, this is the sign that his message is nothing but nobility. Since God said about them "in the hands of envoys, noble and

pious," it implies that they are messengers or envoys of nobility—i.e., the message that they are bringing is the message of nobility. It is as if God was saying, "Through these angels I have sent you a message that you should become noble." To summarize, then, the instructor is noble, the messengers are noble, and the scriptures are noble as well.

Hence, the Qur'ān does not encourage human beings to pursue the mundane world; such an act is not promoted within the class of God. If someone seeks to attain the world by means of the Qur'ān, it implies that he wants to obtain a lowly commodity by means of the noble Qur'ān. In reality, this person has deluded himself since it is not possible that someone obtain a lowly commodity by means of a noble capital. If someone is this narrow-minded, he has been deprived of benefitting from the essence of the Qur'ān (which is nothing other than nobility).

Therefore, the Qur'ān is a noble book, the bearers of this book are noble, the instructor of this book is noble, and the true apprentices of this book—the prophets and saints—will also be noble.

Now, before mankind begins to learn this book, the angels are actually the apprentices of it. When we say that the angels are the bearers of this book, it does not imply that they blindly take a book from somewhere and deliver it to someone or that they simply carry the cover and binding of the Qur'ān. Rather, it means that they are the bearers of the lofty sciences of the Qur'ān. So when it is said that the angels are the envoys that bring the Qur'ān, it is not to say that God has handed a physical book over to them composed of paper and a leather cover, saying, "take this to the earth"; rather, the angels [themselves] become the custodians of the meaning, wisdom, and ethical teachings of the Qur'ān. In other words, they are knowers (*ʿārif*) of that wisdom (*maʿārif*) and they are moulded (*mutakhalliq*) with those morals (*akhlāq*). God has taught the angels that wisdom and made them the custodians of those meanings and realities.

Conveying revelation is different from any formal type of transmission. On earth, it is quite possible to dictate a message to a messenger, who can then memorize it without understanding it. Thereupon, he may successfully deliver it to its recipient

while not having truly comprehended its meaning. The transmission of revelation and the delegation of angels, however, are not like this; rather, as mentioned, the angels possess the wisdom and ethical teachings of the Qur'ān. They comprehend the sciences of the heavenly scripture and possess the ethical teachings that the Qur'ān wishes to imbibe humanity with. It is only after intellectual erudition and the practical act of moulding that they are then ready to convey this message of God. So when an angel descends on someone, it does so with that intellectual awareness and practical integrity of character.

According to the following verse, the angels descend on those people who are unwavering [in their faith]:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قالوا رَبُّنَا اللَّـهُ ثُمَّ استَقاموا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيهِمُ
المَلائِكَةُ أَلّا تَخافوا وَلا تَحزَنوا وَأَبشِروا بِالجَنَّةِ الَّتي كُنتُم
توعَدونَ

Indeed those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah!' and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, [saying,] 'Do not fear, nor be grieved! Receive the good news of the Paradise which you have been promised. (41:30)

When the noble angels (who are the divine envoys) descend upon the heart of such an individual, they are able to teach him the sciences and wisdom [of the Qur'ān] and to impart in his heart the method by means of which he is able to adopt its ethical virtues. Moreover, they remove from his heart the attachment to this world which is an impediment to nobility and a bandit [lying in wait] on the Straight Path.

Hence, so long as man lives within the confines of the conventions of this world, he will not be able to become the apprentice of the most-Noble God. This is because the confines of the world (*dunyā*) are the confines of baseness (*danāwah*). It is not possible that someone sit in a heap of waste with the hopes of taking pleasure from the fragrance of a rose. Thus, in so far as the people of the world are attached to the mundane world, they will never become apprentices of the most-Noble God.

What is the "Reprehensible World"?

Of course, we must not lose sight of the fact that when we say 'the world' (*dunyā*) we do not intend the earth and sky. The sky, the earth, the ocean, the desert—these are not what comprise the world, for these phenomena are existential beings in the external world; as divine signs, they partake of the Truth. Rather, what comprises 'the world' are the arbitrary conventions that we have contrived—arrogance and covetousness, for example. This is different from the sky and earth, which are signs of God. In fact, the Qur'ān mentions with honour phenomena such as the earth, the sky, and other external existents, and none of these true existents can be defined as evil. For example, if trees were actually evil then God would not have spoken about their existence and cultivation to such an extent. In the Qur'ān, does God not say that He sends water for them and thus causes them to grow?

وَأَنزَلَ لَكُم مِنَ السَّماءِ ماءً فَأَنبَتنا بِهِ حَدائِقَ ذاتَ بَهجَةٍ
ما كانَ لَكُم أَن تُنبِتوا شَجَرَها

... and sends down for you water from the sky, whereby We grow delightful gardens, whose trees you could never cause to grow ...
(27:60)

Or in respect to agriculture, does God not say that He is Himself the gardener and cultivator?

أَأَنتُم تَزرَعونَهُ أَم نَحنُ الزّارِعونَ

Is it you who make it grow, or are We the growers? (56:64)

The point is that external phenomena such as the sky and the earth are not evil in themselves for none of these phenomena are *of the world*. Rather 'the world' is a term that is used to refer to arbitrary conventions. For example, when an individual prides himself with having a certain amount of wealth or having attained a certain position in society, this would be a manifestation of 'the world'.

God has introduced the world in the following way:

اعلَموا أَنَّمَا الحَياةُ الدُّنيا لَعِبٌ وَلَهوٌ وَزينَةٌ وَتَفاخُرٌ بَينَكُم وَتَكاثُرٌ فِي الأَموالِ وَالأَولادِ

Know that the life of this world is just play and diversion, and glitter, and mutual vainglory among you and covetousness for wealth and children ... (57:20)

Basing himself on this verse, the late Shaykh Bahā'ī (*r*) says that we can summarize the world—from the period of infancy to that of old age and infirmity—into five sections: 1) play (*laʿib*), 2) diversion (*lahw*), 3) glitter (*zīnah*), 4) mutual vainglory (*tafākhur*) and 5) covetousness (*takāthur*).

To explain, when man is an infant or child, it is a time of play and diversion. When he becomes an adolescent, it is a time of [love for] beauty and glitter. When he becomes mature, and when position and stature become important for him, it is a time of mutual vainglory. Finally, when he is old and decrepit and is deprived of all the previous four things, it is a time of covetousness. At this stage of his life, man simply takes pleasure in the fact that he has a large amount of wealth or children.

God has never reprehended the existence of the earth. The earth is a creation in the external world and is one of the portents of God. It preserves the secrets of the Children of Adam, and on that Day—when it is necessitated—it will recount these secrets accurately (after having preserved them in trust).

يَومَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخبارَها

On that day she will relate her chronicles. (99:4)

The earth, then, is a real being not an arbitrary one of this world. It is that which is arbitrary and worldly which is what has been reproached (*madhmūm*).

Therefore, if someone wishes to participate in the class where nobility is taught, the first condition is that he must not be inclined to the world. In other words, he must not succumb to lowliness and ignobleness. It is not possible for a dishonourable man to sit in a class of nobility face to face with the noble angels and have the fortitude to bear their mission. It is also impossible for him to confront the noble Scriptures and obtain their lofty

wisdom. This is because lowliness and nobility are irreconcilable—hence, it is not possible for the ignoble to become noble [unless they first lose their ignobleness].

For this reason, God has outlined the boundaries of the school of nobility. First of all, since He is the true teacher, He has described Himself as the most-Noble. After this, He has identified the scriptures as noble. Third, based on the tradition previously mentioned, He has stated that the delegation of the prophets was for the sole purpose of teaching human beings the way to nobility; as for the Seal of the Prophets, his assignment was to perfect the noble ethical qualities [that the previous prophets had introduced]. Then God says: "He taught man what he did not know" (96:5)—in other words, God taught man something that was impossible for him to have learned using his own capabilities. Of course, this fact is not something that is exclusively limited to exoteric knowledge; it applies to esoteric wisdom as well.

Nobility and Man's Innate Disposition (Fiṭrah)

Man is in possession of both an internal and external "capital". To explain, human beings have not been created in such a way that they are indifferent with respect to various creeds and ideologies or that there are absolutely no predispositions of knowledge and understanding within man's heart. In reality, when God brought man into being, his existence was imbued with a certain amount of wisdom. Even though man is free to choose between traversing the right path or wandering through the erroneous one, God gifted him with a capital that clearly orients him [in the direction of good]. This capital is none other than his innate disposition (*fiṭrah*) towards seeking the truth and desiring it. God has equipped man both in terms of his intelligence and his ethical inclinations. God has identified this internal weapon as a proof (*ḥujjah*) while instructing him externally in His class of nobility.

With regard to the external sciences such as the various human industries and trades, God says the following:

وَاللَّـهُ أَخرَجَكُم مِن بُطونِ أُمَّهاتِكُم لا تَعلَمونَ شَيـًٔا

Allah has brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything ... (16:78)

In other words, God brought you out of the wombs of your mothers while you did not know any of those trades that help fulfil man's [worldly] needs. He gave you hearing, sight, intelligence, and a heart so that you may be able to obtain these trades. By means of these, you are able to establish a connection with the external world and to learn its secrets.

وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمعَ وَالأَبصارَ وَالأَفئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُم تَشكُرونَ

... He made for you hearing, eyesight, and hearts so that you may give thanks. (16:78)

So this knowledge is that which man obtains from the outside and which he does not possess at the time of birth. With regard to divine wisdom, which is the essential capital of man, God says the following: I have created man with an intellectual capital. He has not been created equally indifferent to faith and infidelity. Even though he is free to choose whatever path he so wishes, I have still implanted in him true wisdom and an inclination towards it. God says:

فَأَقِم وَجهَكَ لِلدّينِ حَنيفًا فِطرَتَ اللَّـهِ الَّتي فَطَرَ النّاسَ عَلَيها لا تَبديلَ لِخَلقِ اللَّـهِ ذٰلِكَ الدّينُ القَيِّمُ

So set your face on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination (fitrah) of Allah according to which He originated mankind. There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion ... (30: 30)

In other words, turn the face of your soul towards divine religion. This natural tendency to desire God and worship Him is something that has existed within the inner depths of man throughout human history and will continue to do so; no man is lacking in this disposition.

Therefore, it is not the case that the heart is indifferent towards various creeds or that the soul is equally pulled from the outset towards various perspectives and schools of thought. It

was not created in this way. Rather, the spiritual capital of recognizing God and desiring Him can be found within the depths of his soul, and it is God who has granted man this endowment.

Man is a Well-Proportioned Creation

God created man as a well-proportioned creation (*mustawi al-khalqah*). It is possible for a certain individual to have an imperfection in the body, though the defects of the body are not that important [from a spiritual point of view]. In such a case, to the extent of his physical disabilities, many of his religious responsibilities will be waived from him; in other words, if God creates a flaw in a particular part of a man's body, He will obviously not expect the same obligations from him as one who is completely free of any such defects.

However, when it comes to the question of the spirit-soul, God has not created any soul imperfectly:

وَنَفسٍ وَما سَوّاها

By the soul and Him who fashioned it [proportionately]. (91:7)

Following this verse, God proceeds to explain that the well-proportioned nature of the soul lies in the fact that virtues and vices have been revealed to it. The soul does not have a specific shape, countenance, or a set of limbs such that its proportionality or lack of such could be perceptible. Rather, its well-proportioned nature depends upon that which is of the same nature as itself (i.e. that which is immaterial). Hence, the soul becomes well-proportioned by being inspired with [the knowledge of] vices and virtues:

فَأَلهَمَها فُجورَها وَتَقواها

And inspired it [i.e., the soul] with [discernment between] its vices and virtues (taqwā). (91: 8)

God inspired every human being with [this knowledge of] human vices and virtues—a matter that is ethical in nature and involves the inclination to perform righteous deeds.

Therefore, on the one hand, God has inspired man with a divine monotheistic outlook as He says:

فِطرَتَ اللَّـهِ الَّتي فَطَرَ النّاسَ عَلَيها

... the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind ... (30:30)

and on the other hand, He has also created in him an inclination to perform deeds that are ethically good as He says:

فَأَلهَمَها فُجورَها وَتَقواها

And inspired it [i.e., the soul] with [discernment between] its vices and virtues (taqwā). (91:8)

Stated differently, God has created man in such a way that if the lowly grime of the love of this world does not gather upon the face of the mirror of his soul, man will not only see God but will seek Him out as well; he will recognize the path of virtue/God-wariness (*taqwā*) and the path of vice; and he will abstain from vice and attain God-wariness. When he attains God-wariness, he will become noble. This is because the spindle around which nobility revolves is God-wariness.

To explain, God, who is the true and essential instructor, has identified Himself as being the most-Noble God. He has praised the heavenly scriptures that contain the curriculum as being noble. He characterizes the messengers who bring these scriptures as being noble. After all this, He also considers God-wariness as the means of obtaining nobility, for He says:

إِنَّ أَكرَمَكُم عِندَ اللَّـهِ أَتقاكُم

... Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-wary among you ... (49: 13)

In other words, the God-wary person is noble and the more God-wary an individual is the more noble he will be. Outside the spindle of God-wariness, nobility is not to be found.

Based on this, we can say that the source of nobility—which is God-wariness—was inspired within the inner depths of man just as the vices—which are the causes of baseness—was announced to him as well. If God-wariness is the source of nobility then the vices will naturally be the source of ignobleness. It is for this very reason that the following concept has been transmitted (using different expressions) in our traditions: "Love of

the world is the root of all evil." In other words, love of baseness is the source of every sin and fall [from nobility]. Hence, vices are the source of baseness—i.e., no man infatuated with the world is free from vice. In contrast, every noble individual has benefited from God-wariness.

Consequently, if God has made Himself known as the most-noble teacher, He has not done so in general terms and without clearly demarcating the means by which human beings may attain this nobility. He also states that the ones who look after us are also noble—watching over us.

وَإِنَّ عَلَيكُم لَحَافِظِينَ كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ

Indeed, there are over you watchers, noble (kirām) writers (82:10-11)

Sometimes man slackens in his conduct when he is in the presence of ordinary individuals, but when he finds himself before one who is noble he strives harder to avoid making mistakes or falling into sin. It is for this reason that God reminds us that there are guardian angels—extremely noble and magnanimous in nature—watching over us. These noble guardians can see us. Some of the noble messengers brought revelation to us while others, who are noble like them, watch over our deeds. They wait to see what kind of response we show to the religious edicts.

It is possible that the beings that bring revelation to the prophets are different from the noble beings that record the deeds of men; nevertheless, they share a common attribute—that of nobility. Therefore, not only are the bearers of revelation noble but the observers of man's deeds are noble as well. In many instances, those noble witnesses close their eyes, with the command of God, and do not write down our base actions in order to give us an opportunity to change our filth into the beauty of righteous actions.

To summarize, then, the prophets taught men something that they could not have known [on their own]—it is not that they did not know it in actuality; rather, it is not even possible for them to comprehend these matters independently in the future. Stated differently, the idea of human science progressing

to the point where it takes the place of revelation is an impossibility; science can never relieve human societies of the need for revelation. Second, God has given man not only inner knowledge as an asset but also external revenue. If we should obtain knowledge from the outside using the resources that God has provided us within, then in both cases, the true instructor is God. No one can say, "I strove on my own and became a scholar." If someone thinks in these terms, he should realize the Qārūnian nature of it, since Qārūn said (albeit with regard to wealth):

قالَ إِنَّما أُوتيتُهُ عَلىٰ عِلمٍ عِندي

He said, 'I have indeed been given [all] this because of the knowledge that I have.' (28:78)

However, others may make similar statements with respect to knowledge. If someone says, "I struggled and obtained knowledge on my own," then he should understand that he will never reach [the lofty peaks of] nobility. That which he has learned at the various educational institutes will eventually be taken away from him. This is because God does not place knowledge, which is a light, in the hands of everyone to remain with them forever. In fact, some people will forget what they know towards the end of their lives:

وَمِنكُم مَن يُرَدُّ إِلىٰ أَرذَلِ العُمُرِ لِكَي لا يَعلَمَ بَعدَ عِلمٍ شَيئًا

There are some among you who are relegated to the nethermost age so that he knows nothing after [having possessed] some knowledge. (16:70)

Some of the most educated of people die illiterate because they forget whatever they have learned.

The very first condition for acquiring nobility is to be free of the world. Nobility and the attachment to the world cannot coexist. It is for this reason that the attributes of [the noble] angels are often mentioned for those individuals who have freed themselves from attachment to the world. For example, in *Ziyārah al-Jāmi'ah* we address the Imams (*'a*) in the following way:

وَ عِبادِهِ الْمُكْرَمِينَ الَّذِينَ لا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَ هُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُون

And His *ennobled servants*, who do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by his command.[1]

These qualities are the same ones that have been revealed regarding the angels, as is evident from Surah Anbiyā:

وَقالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحمـٰنُ وَلَدًا سُبحانَهُ بَل عِبادٌ مُكرَمونَ لا
يَسبِقونَهُ بِالقَولِ وَهُم بِأَمرِهِ يَعمَلونَ

They say, 'The All-beneficent has taken offspring.' Immaculate is He! Rather they are [His] ennobled (mukramun) servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command. (21:26-27)

The polytheists claimed that God had taken the angels as children for Himself. The logic of the noble Qur'ān, however, is that God is too immaculate to have a physical taint to Him or to have offspring. Rather, the angels are noble servants of God and they do not do anything without divine permission.

From this we can gather that man has the ability to also become the noble servant of God. This, however, has certain conditions: He must sit in the noble school of God, act according to the mandates of the noble scriptures, receive and accept the message of the noble envoys, and finally become a disciple of the most-Noble God. Such a status was gained by the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt (Household of the Prophet). Moreover, in the blessed Surah Yāsīn, the same can be said about the martyr, whose message has been related in the following way:

قيلَ ادخُلِ الجَنَّةَ قالَ يا لَيتَ قَومي يَعلَمونَ بِما غَفَرَ لي رَبّي
وَجَعَلَني مِنَ المُكرَمينَ

He was told, 'Enter Paradise!' He said, 'Alas! Had my people only known for what my Lord forgave me and made me one of the ennobled ones (mukramīn)!' (36:26-27)

This implies that God has placed him amongst the ranks of angels [who have the same title of being 'ennobled'].

[1] "Ziyārah al-jāmi'ah", *Man lā yaḥḍaruhu al-faqīh*, v. 6, p. 609.

A Summary of the Discussion

A summary of our discussion is as follows: Nobility is opposed to baseness, and baseness lies within the folds of the mundane world. All of the dimensions of this world are base and low; as such anyone who is infatuated with this world will never be able to taste nobility. The world is summarized into the five stages that have been alluded to in Surah Ḥadīd:

اعلَموا أَنَّمَا الحَياةُ الدُّنيا لَعِبٌ وَلَهوٌ وَزينَةٌ وَتَفاخُرٌ بَينَكُم
وَتَكاثُرٌ فِي الأَموالِ وَالأَولادِ

Know that the life of this world is just play and diversion, and glitter, and mutual vainglory among you, and covetousness for wealth and children ... (57:20)

He who is infatuated with baseness [of this world] will never be the student of the divine noble school. The first condition for obtaining nobility is to be free from attachment to this world; or stated differently, the greatest setback on the path to nobility is rebelliousness.

كَلّا إِنَّ الإِنسانَ لَيَطغىٰ

Never! Verily man is rebellious! (96:6)

The various sciences that man learns so that he may become noble must be used in facilitating the blossoming of his essential capital. Man's essential capital is his innate disposition of desiring God. In terms of meaning, it appears as the knowledge of nobility, and in terms of ethics, it is the inspiration towards God-wariness and the awareness of immorality. The inspiration that he has towards God-wariness is an inspiration towards the fulcrum of nobility, while inspiration towards immorality is an inspiration towards the axis of baseness. Whoever walks the path of the God-wary will become noble, and whoever becomes the most God-wary will become the most-noble—for the only path to nobility is through God-wariness. If God has identified certain people as the most noble, it is because they were the most God-wary and had freed themselves from attachment to the world, whether they were angels, divinely appointed prophets, Imams, or even martyrs. In fact, when God mentions

the prominent blessings such as sainthood [that He gives to such individuals], He does so using the phrase "a noble provision."

أُولـٰئِكَ هُمُ المُؤمِنونَ حَقًّا لَهُم مَغفِرَةٌ وَرِزقٌ كَريمٌ

It is they who are truly the faithful. For them shall be forgiveness and a noble (karīm) provision. (8:74)

Also, even though knowledge is valuable, it must be accompanied with struggle on the plane of the will and longing on the plane of the heart in order for it to take man towards nobility. Hence knowledge on its own is not adequate. Until man is not inclined to act he will not become noble. This inclination to act is something other than the action itself. If man acts according to divine mandates due to a sense of obligation or in order to escape hellfire, then he will not [necessarily] arrive at nobility; in this case he has only saved himself from baseness. However, if he forms an aversion to the world—in other words, whenever someone talks about the world, he feels a sense of disgust—then he should realize that he has tasted the sweet nectar of nobility.

Advice from ʿAlī (ʿa), the Commander of the Faithful

The following has been related from the Commander of the Faithful (ʿa) in the book *Ghurar wa Durar*:

صَابِرُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ عَلَى فِعْلِ الطَّاعَاتِ وَ صُونُوهَا عَنْ دَنَسِ السَّيِّئَاتِ تَجِدُوا حَلَاوَةَ الْإِيمَانِ

Force your souls to bear with patience the performance of worship, and protect them from the filth of evils. [If you do this] you will taste the sweetness of faith.[1]

This means that you should compel yourself with patience to perform good deeds and protect your honour from the filth of sin; it is then that you will taste the sweetness of faith. One who has tasted the sweetness of faith has begun to tread the mount of nobility and will gradually become noble.

When God says, "verily, We have honoured the Children of Adam," it refers to the essential nobility granted to man. In

[1] *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, v. 4, no. 5891 (Tehran University Print).

other words, in so far as man is man, he has the ability to become noble. However, if someone loses his humanity and falls from his elevated position due to becoming afflicted with baseness, he will no longer be considered 'man'. Man has a soul that is his true self and which is naturally honourable. Man does not possess two equal realities in himself—i.e., his spirit and his body; rather one of these is principal, while the other is auxiliary. It is the spirit that is man's essential dimension, and it has various levels of its own. Therefore, that which God gave to man as his essence is nobility [since his essence is his spirit and his spirit is naturally noble]. Other factors and causes may assist man in nurturing this asset or of losing it altogether.

The point is that man is essentially noble. It is possible that he may have certain inclinations to the natural world but, from the point of view of his spirit and essential nature, he is predisposed towards nobility. As the sixth Imam (ᶜ*a*) says:

أَصْلُ الإِنْسَانِ لُبُّه

The essence of man is his *lubb* (core, heart, or intellect)[1]

This confirms that man does not possess two essences that are equal in nature within him (i.e. the spirit and the body) so that the spirit might be indifferent to these virtues; rather, he possesses one essence that is called the spirit, and one auxiliary called the body. It is because this essence is naturally inclined to nobility that God has identified man as an essentially noble being.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

[1] *Amālī* of Sadūq, session 42, no. 9.

Session Two

A Reminder

Our discussion was on the subject of man's nobility according to the noble Qur'ān. Nobility is a perfection of the soul and stands opposed to ignobleness. It is also counted amongst the qualities of the angels. The perfection of man lies in acquiring this lofty virtue—a task which is possible only after undergoing certain preliminaries that lie on the plane of thought and action. Infatuation with the world and with its transient vanities is an obstacle that hinders the materialization of nobility. This is because the baseness of the material world is not in harmony with the lofty nature of nobility, since nobility is, in reality, of an otherworldly dimension.

God says that the Qur'ān is a noble book:

إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ

This is indeed a noble Qur'an. (56:77)

This means that the curriculum that it contains seeks to make human beings acquainted with the quality of nobility. Elsewhere, God orders us in the following way:

فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ

... So recite as much of the Qur'an as is feasible ... (73:20)

When we put these two verses together, we derive the following conclusion: Man must utilize the noble curriculum of the Qur'ān as much as is possible.

God, who is the source of revelation of this Book, is the most noble:

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

Read, and your Lord is the most noble. (96:3)

In Surah Naml, God says:

فَلَمَّا رَآهُ مُستَقِرًّا عِندَهُ قالَ هٰذا مِن فَضلِ رَبّي لِيَبلُوَني
أَأَشكُرُ أَم أَكفُرُ وَمَن شَكَرَ فَإِنَّما يَشكُرُ لِنَفسِهِ وَمَن كَفَرَ
فَإِنَّ رَبّي غَنِيٌّ كَريمٌ

... So when he [i.e., Prophet Solomon] saw it [i.e., the throne] set near him, he said, 'This is by the grace of my Lord, to test me if I will give thanks or be ungrateful. And whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful [should know that] my Lord is indeed all-sufficient, noble.' (27:40)

When Solomon (*ʿa*) saw the throne of the Queen of Sheba before him—a throne that was brought to him in less than the twinkling of an eye—he said: This miraculous ability and spiritual grace (*karāmah*) [of the one who had brought him the throne due to his knowledge of the Book] is from the grace of my Lord in order to test me as to whether I am thankful for this great blessing or ungrateful. If someone is grateful, his gratitude contributes to his own perfection. If someone is ungrateful, however, then "my Lord is indeed all-sufficient, noble."

Therefore, God possesses the attribute of nobility. This noble God is the instructor of mankind and He left his educational curriculum in the hands of noble messengers:

بِأَيدي سَفَرَةٍ كِرامٍ بَرَرَةٍ

In the hands of envoys, noble and pious. (80:15-16)

So, the angels who are the bearers of this message and the very path of revelation are noble. In other words, the divine revelation first passes through a noble medium before it reaches man. Moreover, during this journey, it is completely protected from any harm. This is because the envoys of revelation are not just the possessors of nobility; they also possess the highest degree of trustworthiness.

To take the discussion further now, we have said that the most-Noble God is the source of the Qurʾān, and the Qurʾān is itself a noble book. Moreover, the path that this book traverses through is a noble passage. Finally, the Perfect Man, who receives this book and becomes our mentor, instructing us on its lofty wisdom, is also noble:

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ

It is indeed the speech of a noble apostle. (81:19)

As is evident, all of the sources, factors, and requisites that lie in the text or margin of this Book [i.e., that directly or indirectly relate to the Book] are accompanied with nobility. This, in itself, acts as an irrefutable proof that God wants to take man to the lofty station of nobility [and to make him] like the angels. Hence, the mission of the prophets is to ennoble mankind. A testament to this fact is the statement of the Prophet (ṣ):

إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لِأُتَمِّمَ مَكَارِمَ الْأَخْلَاقِ

I have been delegated [as a prophet] to perfect noble ethical traits.[1]

To paraphrase him: I have been raised as a Prophet so as to complete the [spiritual] paths of the forgone prophets. They came and exposed mankind to nobility, and since my religion (*dīn*) is complete and perfect—or more precisely, the most complete and perfect of religions—my task is also to complete man's noble ethical traits.

Since it has become clear that the foundation of heavenly teachings is based on the nobility of man, we must now attempt to recognize the factors that facilitate nobility and those that prevent it from emerging, so that with this awareness, we may be able to strive to inculcate nobility within ourselves.

God-wariness: the Basis of Wisdom

In the noble Qur'ān, God considers God-wariness / God-consciousness (*taqwā*) to be the sole pivot around which nobility revolves. God-wariness in turn comes about as the result of wisdom and righteous deeds. If someone does not know truth from falsehood or is unaware of what God has made permissible and what He has prohibited, then he cannot become noble. In the same way, if he knows the divine regulations but does not act upon his knowledge, then he will not become noble. Hence,

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 16, p. 210.

only that person is noble who knows the divine rules, frees himself from ugly deeds, and beautifies his soul with exquisite divine characteristics.

If we want to explain the importance of the station of nobility, then it is enough to point out that the very first set of verses that were revealed to the heart of the blessed Prophet (ṣ) are about nobility, and the last verse revealed is about God-wariness, which, as we mentioned earlier, is the pivot around which nobility revolves. According to the famous tradition, revelation began with the following verses:

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

Read, and your Lord is the most noble, who taught by the pen.
(96:3-4)

And it ended with the verse:

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللَّـهِ ۖ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

And be wary of a day in which you will be brought back to Allah. Then every soul shall be recompensed fully for what it has earned, and they will not be wronged. (2:281)

After this verse was revealed, the holy Prophet received a message through Gabriel that ordered him to place it after the verse 280 of Surah Baqarah. Although the last complete chapter that was revealed to the Prophet was Surah Naṣr, the last verse that was revealed to him (according to a famous tradition) was this verse that concerns God-wariness.

To summarize, then, the first verse that was revealed to the Prophet (ṣ) was one that reminded men of the nobility of God, while the last verse that was revealed to him after twenty-three years was a verse that spoke of the fulcrum of that nobility—i.e., God-wariness—and announced the fact that there is no source of nobility other than God-wariness. In this regards, the following verse is quite revealing:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ
شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّـهِ
أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّـهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-wary among you ... (49:13)

In other words: O people! We have created you from a male and a female. Being a man or woman has nothing to do with nobility. Being a man is not a condition for becoming noble nor is being a woman an obstacle to it. This is because nobility is a quality of the spirit, and the spirit of a human being is neither male nor female. Being male or female pertains to the body. For any living body, either it has been created with certain features that identify it as being male, or it has been created with certain other features that identify it as being female. But the human spirit is beyond masculinity or femininity; the immaterial spirit is neither male nor female. If they say that men and women are equal, this does not imply that there are two types of human spirits (one male and the other female) that are equal to one another. Rather, it wishes to negate the topic altogether [i.e., in so far as men and women have the same spirit, they are equal; but the spirit itself cannot be divided into such divisions]. Hence, there is no talk of being male or female when it comes to the spirit. The fact is that the human spirit is immaterial and all ethical virtues are related to it. Therefore, neither is being a man a cause for pride nor is being a woman an obstacle to nobility.

The same can be said about belonging to any particular branch, tribe, or race—they do not act as obstacles to nor as causes for the appearance of nobility. The differences in race, dialect, language, and colour are like natural identity cards for each person that always remain with them; they are used in social life to distinguish them from one another. They do not cause nobility nor do they hinder it.

The real criterion of nobility in God's eyes is undoubtedly God-wariness (*taqwā*). The God-wary man is a noble man;

hence, whoever is the most God-wary is the most noble. So just as the existence and non-existence of nobility depends upon the existence and non-existence of God-wariness, the intensity and weakness of nobility also depends upon the intensity and weakness of God-wariness. This explains why God says:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

... Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-wary among you ... (49:13)

As is evident, this noble verse restricts the sole criterion of nobility to God-wariness. Other than God-wariness, there is no yard-stick for nobility.

Wealth is not a Sign of Nobility

On the same note, in Surah Fajr, God relates and negates one of the incorrect assumptions of certain individuals regarding the honouring and dishonouring of man:

فَأَمَّا الْإِنسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ كَلَّا ۖ بَل لَّا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ

As for man, whenever his Lord tests him and grants him nobility and blesses him, he says, 'My Lord has ennobled me.' But when He tests him and tightens for him his provision, he says, 'My Lord has humiliated me.' No indeed! Rather you do not honour the orphan... (89:15-17)

Some people surmise that power brings about nobility, and as a result, they say that indigence and poverty hinder it from coming into existence. This is however an incorrect assumption. These blessings—that are unconnected to man's soul—are not the cause of his nobility. Not only are wealth and riches not the factors in man's nobility, but any other blessing such as property, position, status, children, etc.—that are not connected to his soul—also have no role in his becoming noble. On the same

token, they are not the factors of his being dishonoured or disgraced either. Whether we are speaking of man's nobility or his debasement, in either case it depends on the qualities of his soul.

The Way of the Noble Ones

After we have specified the pivot around which nobility revolves from the point of view of the noble Qur'ān then we should study the instructive conduct of those people who were able to obtain the attribute of nobility by means of God-wariness. Such a study will pave the way for us to also adopt this lofty virtue in our soul. In Surah Furqān, God the all-merciful mentions the qualities of His special servants:

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا

Those who do not give false testimony, and when they come upon vain talk, pass by nobly. (25:72)

These are people who will not be present in gatherings where sin is being committed nor will they give false testimony. If they should happen to pass by evil or vain situations, they pass by with nobility for they are never ready to participate in vain gatherings. When they want to forbid others from committing evil, they do so in an honourable fashion as well.

Now it is true that believers are those who keep away from vain things from the outset, as God says:

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ

[the believers] who avoid vain talk (23:3)

But the point of the verse mentioned previously [25:72] is that if, by chance, believers of the merciful God pass by vain things, they do so in a noble fashion. In other words, not only do they avoid such gatherings, but if out of a sense of duty they wish to guide those people who are afflicted with such fancies then they do so in a noble manner. Therefore, vain deeds are detrimental to the nobility of man; it is for this reason that a noble man shuns the pursuit of such frivolity and passes by it in a noble fashion.

Limitless God-wariness

Since God-wariness is the source for nobility and since there is no limit to the amount of nobility that man can acquire, it follows then that there is no particular limit to God-wariness. It is for this reason that God says the following in Surah Taghābun:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

So be wary of Allah, as much as you are capable of... (64:16)

In other words, prepare the source of your nobility and become God-wary to the extent that you are capable of. This is because man can reach a station where even the angels humble themselves in his presence. He may not be able to reach the station where the angels prostrate to him as in the verse:

فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ

Thereat the angels prostrated, all of them together. (15:30)

However, at least [he can reach a spiritual position where] they will come to greet him, pay him benedictions, and open the doors of Heaven to him.

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا
وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ
فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ

Those who are wary of their Lord will be led to Paradise in throngs. When they reach it, and its gates are opened, its keepers will say to them, 'Peace be to you! You are welcome! Enter it to remain [forever].' (39:73)

Therefore nobility is unlimited since God-wariness, which is the basis of nobility, has no limits, as God says: "So be wary of Allah, as much as you are capable of" (64: 16). Now, capability or capacity is not something limited such that man be commanded to obtain only a limited amount of God-wariness. In truth, capability is limitless because every level of God-wariness lays the ground for an even higher degree of capability. If God-wariness gives man [greater] capacity, and if man must be wary

of God as much as he is capable of, then there is no limit to God-wariness.

To explain this from another angle, when man witnesses the perfection and beauty of the Truth, not only does that witnessing make him forget the suffering that he endured until then [while attempting to reach his particular station] but it also prepares him to continue on this path in the future. Conversely, the person who does not see the perfection of the Unseen and the beauty of Meaning will naturally feel weary [on the spiritual path]. However, the person who can witness the hidden secrets of the universe, one after another, will never feel vulnerable or helpless.

It is God-wariness that gives man the ability to see the secrets and unseen signs of the universe. As such, the difficulties of the past are compensated and the ground is paved for further capacity [on his spiritual journey].

In another verse, God says:

إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

... If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you ...
(8:29)

In other words, if you have God-wariness, then He will give you the power to discriminate between truth and falsehood. From this it can be deduced that the power to differentiate truth from falsehood is not some ordinary faculty that man may acquire by reading [a few books]. This is because, in many instances, man mistakenly takes the truth for falsehood and vice versa. Or if he should, by chance, differentiate well between truth and falsehood, he cannot distinguish that which is important from that which has greater importance. But the way of God-wariness is the most essential means by which man can gain the ability to distinguish between good and bad or between the important and that which has more importance. Of course, the person who is able to separate the truth from falsehood, who witnesses the beauty of the truth, and who is aware of the ugliness of falsehood will ardently move in the direction of the truth. If you see that the friends of God do not stay calm [but passionately strive

towards God], it is because each of them, in his own fashion, has seen some of the unseen realities and tasted their sweetness.

Therefore, one must not say that since man's tolerance is limited, his God-wariness is also limited, and as a result, his nobility will also be restricted. Far from limiting spiritual strength, God-wariness actually increases it and causes the heart to expand. When man's heart expands, greater divine grace comes his way.

Of course, capability itself must be obtained. This is because capabilities are sometimes God-given and sometimes acquired. Hence, one must strive to obtain knowledge, inner wisdom, and at least the weaker levels of God-wariness with the hope that this may lay the grounds for [spiritual] capacities wherein man may find his way into higher stations. Therefore, the command for us to be wary of God as much as we are capable of is not a daunting task; this is because God-wariness itself gives us the strength that we will need [to acquire even greater degrees of it].

The same message is repeated in another verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ

O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah with the wariness due to Him ... (3:102)

In other word, be wary of God to the degree that He deserves and to the degree that God-wariness itself demands. Moreover, the right of being wary of God is not limited. From this we can gather that by focusing his attention on the essentially unlimited power [of God], man has the capability of obtaining an unlimited amount of strength. Man, on account of his piety and God-wariness, reaches a stage where he becomes captivated in such a way that he is "taken" the rest of the way.

The Captivated Wayfarer (Sālik-e Majdhūb) and the One who is Captivated by the Wayfarer (Majdhūb-e Sālik)

At times, God may say, "My travellers are coming towards Me"; at other times, He may say, "I will bring my travellers towards Me." For example, He says the following about Moses (*ʿa*):

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَىٰ لِمِيقَاتِنَا

When Moses came to Our rendezvous ... (7:143)

Or He relates the following regarding Abraham (ᶜa):

وَقَالَ إِنِّي ذَاهِبٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي

He said, 'Indeed I am going toward my Lord ...' (37:99)

Of course, what is meant by "coming" or "going" is not a physical journey, since God is already with man in all conditions and in all places as He says:

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ

... And He is with you wherever you may be ... (57:4)

وَهُوَ الَّذِي فِي السَّمَاءِ إِلَٰهٌ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَٰهٌ

It is He who is God in the sky, and God on the earth ... (43:83)

Rather the meaning of this "coming" and "going" [in the first two verses] is that the person moves up in his spiritual rank and existential station and this is the meaning of wayfaring to God.

Now [unlike the first two examples], God says the following about the blessed Seal of the Prophets (ṣ):

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى

Immaculate is He who carried His servant on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque ... (17:1)

In other words, transcendent is God who *took* His servant on a journey by night.

As can be observed, God does not attribute the Prophet's ascension to the Prophet himself—i.e., the verse does not say regarding the Prophet "he came" [as in 7:143] or have the Prophet say "I am going" [as in 37:99]. Rather in this case, God attributes the ascension [of the Prophet] to Himself. He says that God *took* His servant. In other words, not only was the Prophet

captivated by [the beauty of] God but he himself became the focus of God's love; he had moved beyond a simple wayfarer and lover. Hence, his "going" was sustained by God's "taking".

The use of these different expression in the Qur'ān—"he came", "I am going", and "he was carried on a journey"—is not just a stylistic device to create literary appeal. Rather, each phrase seeks to convey a reality that is not found in the other.

Therefore, if the wayfarer traverses a portion of the path, the rest of the way will be sustained by a "divine pull". Similarly, if he can attain God-wariness as it is due—which is unlimited—then the means for accessing unlimited nobility will be facilitated for him. Of course, if someone recognizes God as He deserves to be recognized then it will be possible for him to be wary of God as is His due.

Later, it will be pointed out that it is impossible to obtain God-wariness without knowledge although one can gain knowledge and not be God-wary. The basic God-wariness of the simple-minded cannot take them to the lofty heights of spirituality. Rather it is the God-wariness in light of divine knowledge that can carry man to those lofty stations. Of course, this is the knowledge and wisdom that stems from God-wariness and [which in turn] lays the ground for subsequent God-wariness.

To conclude, we have said that the spindle around which nobility revolves is God-wariness. Just as God-wariness is devoid of any maximum limit, the same is the case for nobility. The noble man has the ability to reach the highest stations of nobility like the angels. By way of example, the various distinctions that God characterizes the angels with (like the fact that they are noble servants of God) have also been used by the Commander of the Faithful (*ʿa*) to praise the Ahl al-Bayt (Household of the Prophet):

فِيهِمْ كَرَائِمُ الْقُرْآنِ وَ هُمْ كُنُوزُ الرَّحْمَنِ إِنْ نَطَقُوا صَدَقُوا وَ إِنْ صَمَتُوا لَمْ يُسْبَقُوا

In them are *noble gems* of the Qur'ān and they are the treasures of the Merciful. When they speak, they speak

> the truth; and when they remain silent, they are not overtaken [i.e., their silence is not because others have preceded them in speech].[i]

This means that all of the noble realities of the Qur'ān can be found in the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa). Whenever mention is made of the station of the Perfect Man (*insān kāmil*), its example is the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa).

These Perfect Humans have a boundless degree of God-wariness based on the limitless amount of knowledge that they possess. They have travelled so far on the path of nobility that they have become manifestations of the noble God. They resemble mirrors in which the nobility of God is reflected and they are the symbols of the divine name "the Noble one"—a name among the most beautiful names of God.

The Manifestations of the Noble One

The Qur'ān says:

وَلِلَّـهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا

To Allah belong the most beautiful Names, so supplicate Him by them ... (7:180)

If this is the case, then it has been related from Imam Ṣādiq (ᶜa):

نَحْنُ- وَاللَّهِ- الأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى

I swear to God that we are the most beautiful Names of God.[ii]

These beautiful names [in the form of the Imams] are Names of the Truth on the plane of action. The plane of action with regard to God is different from the plane of His essence, and therefore demands a contingent manifestation. The Imams (ᶜa) and other Perfect Humans are the manifestations of these blessed names.

If someone makes God-wariness the basis of his life then he will reach nobility, and as we said earlier, the noble human being is the manifestation of the noble God. Now, since the nobility of God is unlimited, the nobility of the Perfect Man (*insān kāmil*) will be the same. It is for this reason that when he

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[i] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 153.
[ii] "Bab al-nawādir min kitāb al-tawḥīd," *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, v. 1, p. 144.

enters the heaven of felicity, there will be no bounds for his nobility.

It is possible that man may be limited in this world in terms of his lifespan and physical ability. This is because, in this world, he must work through his body and unfortunately the body is not completely under the control of the spirit, at least in this domain; hence, it has influence only to the degree of its own capacity. In the Hereafter, however, the spirit will have complete control over the body and since the spirit has unlimited power, every being will be eternal.

Now, one must obtain this boundless nobility by means of God-wariness and this is only possible in this world. The reason for this is because this world is the realm of responsibility and action. It is for this reason that God says:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

So be wary of Allah, as much as you are capable of... (64:16)

اتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ

... Be wary of Allah with the wariness due to Him ... (3:102)

This "wariness that is due to Him" stems from the right of recognizing [Him]. In some verses of the Qur'ān, God says the following about those people who disbelieved in God's sovereignty and divinity:

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّـهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ

They did not regard Allah with the regard due to Him ... (6:91, 22:74, 39:67)

They did not recognize God as He deserves to be recognized. Of course, the verse is not saying that they did not recognize the essence of God since this is not possible for anyone. After all, as Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) says in the *Nahj al-balāghah*:

لَمْ يُطْلِعِ الْعُقُولَ عَلَى تَحْدِيدِ صِفَتِهِ وَ لَمْ يَحْجُبْهَا عَنْ وَاجِبِ مَعْرِفَتِهِ

> He did not inform the minds regarding the limits of His attributes but *He has not hidden from them that which is essential in knowing Him.*[1]

This means that it is not feasible for anyone to fully grasp the essence of God; nevertheless, the amount of knowledge that is necessary and sufficient for man has not been hidden from him either. The path to such a level of knowledge is open. Stated differently, the degree to which man must be aware of God is not something placed out of man's reach; that which has been veiled from him is that which is not incumbent on him to acquire since acquisition of it is not even possible for him.

Therefore, when the verse says that a group of men have not known God the way that they must, it becomes clear that the degree of knowledge that man must have of God is a definite possibility. Hence, some people have recognized God as He deserves to be recognized, while others "did not regard Allah with the regard due to Him" (6:91, 22:73, 39:67). Now as for those who do recognize God as is worthy of Him, they are able to observe God-wariness in the most perfect sense possible. They are the audience of the verse:

اتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ

... Be wary of Allah with the wariness due to Him ... (3:102)

To paraphrase: O believers! Know God as is worthy of Him and then [based on this knowledge] be wary of Him with the wariness due to Him.

The right of knowing God is two-fold: (1) to recognize Him to the extent that is possible, and (2) to admit our inability to know Him any more than that. It is for this reason that the great sage, Āqā ʿAlī Ḥakīm, in his book, *Badāyiʿ al-Ḥikam*, states that in the tradition *Mā ʿarafnāka haqqa maʿrifatika* ("We have not known you as You deserve to be known"), the *haqqa* can be read as *haqqu* [i.e., as the predicate of the sentence] which would allow for the following meaning: "The knowledge we have of You (and which we admit has its shortcomings) is what is demanded of us with regard to knowing You." Of course, the source of this

[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 49.

tradition is still unknown as opposed to a similar tradition found in the illuminating *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah* quoting the angels:

مَا عَبَدْنَاكَ حَقَّ عِبَادَتِك

We have not worshipped You as You deserve to be worshipped.[1]

In any case, if the first tradition [i.e., *"mā ʿarafnāka ..."*] is really from the Imams then it resembles, in content, what has been related from the *Nahj al-Balāghah* [in Sermon 49] and it carries the following meaning: We have not recognized the depths of Your Essence but this is something that we are not capable of doing nor even obliged to do.

Conclusion

In summary, human beings are only responsible to acquire that amount of knowledge of God that they are capable of. It is based on that necessary amount of knowledge that God-wariness becomes feasible. Since nobility depends upon God-wariness, it will follow it in all of its dimensions. Therefore, if someone can obtain the amount of knowledge of God that is necessary (and hence, the knowledge which He is worthy of) then he will be able to obtain the amount of God-wariness that is necessary (and again, the God-wariness which He is worthy of). In the end, the highest level of nobility (the nobility that man is worthy of possessing) will be obtained by the God-wary gnostic. That station is the complete manifestation of the noble God.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

[1] *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, prayer 3.

Session Three

A Reminder

Our discussion was about the nobility of man according to the noble Qur'ān. Until now we have shown how the Almighty has praised all the factors that are involved in the nurturing of man and has described them as being noble.

With the onset of revelation, God describes Himself as a noble instructor:

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

Read, and your Lord is the most noble. (96:3)

He also praised the angels, who are the divine ambassadors, with the quality of being noble and says: This divine trust has reached you through noble messengers. He also introduces the holy Prophet as being a noble messenger and lauds his Book (i.e. the Qur'ān) as being noble and magnanimous.

Thereupon, He made Heaven—which is the *dār al-karāmah* (the abode of nobility) and "wherein there will be neither any vain talk nor sinful speech" (52:23)—to be the place for noble human beings. He says to them that if they traverse the path correctly, then they will inherit Heaven:

تِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي نُورِثُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا مَن كَانَ تَقِيًّا

This is the Paradise We will give as inheritance to those of Our servants who are God-wary. (19:63)

Finally, He introduces God-wariness as being the spindle around which nobility revolves. He expounds on the causes of nobility—God-wariness and its various dimensions—and considers vices and rebelliousness to be the obstacles that hinder nobility.

Nobility and the Divine Spirit

What we want to present in this section is the fact that the noble Qur'ān has also considered the true essence of man as being noble in the sense that if man becomes noble he has traversed a path natural to him and has rediscovered his true

essence. Moreover, since obedience and ascension [towards God] are in line with man's true nature, disobedience and descent [from the heights of spiritual glory] are extraneous to his substance.

As for nobility, it is not extraneous to his substance for the very substance of man is noble.

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

Certainly, We have ennobled the Children of Adam ... (17:70)

In other words, God has honoured man because a noble substance has been used in his creation. If man was only created from clay like the other beings on earth then nobility would not be a primordial or essential quality for him. Man, however, has both a primordial and subsidiary aspect to him. His subsidiary aspect returns to clay but his primordial nature is related to Allah.

إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّن طِينٍ فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ
وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am about to create a human being out of clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him.' (38:71-72)

In this verse, God has linked the spirit (*ruḥ*) to Himself whereas he has associated the body—which is connected to the earth and nature—to clay (*ṭīn*). He did not say that He created man from a composition of clay and immaterial spirit; rather He said that He created man from clay and then breathed into him from His own spirit. Now, since the human spirit is related to God, who is the most-noble instructor, man's spirit must therefore also have a portion of nobility. In other words, the spirit of the divine means the spirit of nobility.

In addition, God has said: "I have created [man] with My two hands" (38:75). This was when God reprimanded Satan and asked him the reason for not prostrating to Adam like the angels. God then praises Adam's lofty station as follows:

قَالَ يَا إِبْلِيسُ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَن تَسْجُدَ لِمَا خَلَقْتُ بِيَدَيَّ ۖ
أَسْتَكْبَرْتَ أَمْ كُنتَ مِنَ الْعَالِينَ

He said, 'O Iblis! What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My [own] two hands? Are you arrogant, or are you [one] of the exalted ones?' (38:75)

The necessary implication of this statement is that Satan and others like him have not been created with the two hands of God.

To be created by "two hands" is either a metaphor used to convey the greatness and nobility of man or it refers to God's attributes of Beauty and Majesty. Either interpretation points to the same fact [i.e., the noble station of man]. If God created man with His two hands of Beauty and Majesty then man will be the locus of God's Beauty and Majesty. He will certainly be higher and more distinguished than those beings that were created with only one hand of God—i.e., with only one set of divine attributes.

As mentioned before, God has introduced the substance of man as being noble. Therefore, if someone should traverse the path of nobility then he has not imposed something heavy or impossible upon himself. However, if he ends up going astray, he has burdened himself with something extraneous.

Therefore, the quality of nobility can be ascribed to all the efficient causes of man's creation and upbringing. The receptive faculty—i.e., man's acceptance and receptivity of the teachings of revelation—can also be described as noble. Moreover, the prophets, who are the teachers of mankind, are also attributed with nobility.

When describing the Prophet (ṣ) and his outstanding disciples, God does not suffice Himself by saying that these people are God-wary; rather He says that the word of God-wariness was necessary for them:

إِذْ جَعَلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْحَمِيَّةَ حَمِيَّةَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ
فَأَنزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ وَعَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَلْزَمَهُمْ

كَلِمَةَ التَّقْوَىٰ وَكَانُوا أَحَقَّ بِهَا وَأَهْلَهَا ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا

When the faithless nourished bigotry in their hearts, the bigotry of pagan ignorance, Allah sent down His composure upon His Apostle and upon the faithful, and made them abide by the word of God-wariness, for they were the worthiest of it and deserved it, and Allah has knowledge of all things. (48:26)

He made God-wariness—which is the spindle of nobility and without which nobility cannot be obtained (as established in the previous discussion)—a necessary attribute of the Prophet (ṣ). In other words, the principle and source of nobility—which is God-wariness—has been made necessary for the blessed being of the Prophet and his companions in the form of the "word of God-wariness." Therefore, the standard of God-wariness will never be separated from the teachers of mankind, and man himself, in turn, also carries a noble substance.

All divine teachings must necessarily be structured in such a way so as not to oppose man's nobility; rather, they should attempt to perfect it. Laws relating to worship, rights, the individual, and society should be framed so that they protect his nobility. The stations that he has in front of him must also protect his nobility. Ultimately, his end must also be a noble one.

God—who has praised the efficient causes as being noble, who has attributed nobility to man (when he accepts the teachings and education of revelation), and who has made the teachings in question to be in line with man's noble substance—says to man: You are a traveller. The end of your journey is the meeting with God or the beatific encounter (*liqāʾ Allah*). This path is the path of nobility. The path of nobility cannot be traversed without a provision. And this provision is none other than God-wariness.

God-wariness and Nobility

We must discuss two principles here: One is that man is a traveller, who needs provision for his journey. Another is that the provision of man who is travelling to God is God-wariness.

If someone is not God-wary then he will be left stranded on the way.

The first principle (i.e., that man is a traveller to God) has been explained in this verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him. (84:6)

In other words, each man is moving towards God and in the end he will meet God. If he wishes to reach the beauty of God and His special mercy, then he must traverse this path with the provision of God-wariness. It is not possible that God sends man out on a quest and not specify a provision for this journey.

The second principle, which is an elucidation of the provision of this [spiritual] journey, has been explained in this verse:

وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ

... and take provision, for indeed the best provision is God-wariness ... (2:197)

In other words, O travellers on the path to nobility! Take a provision for yourselves. Know that the best and only provision for you, who are wayfarers of the spiritual quest, is God-wariness. Incidentally, there is no place in the Qur'ān where anything other than God-wariness has been mentioned as a provision for the traveller.

The Endurance of God-wariness

After we have explained the necessity of acquiring the required provision and have specified God-wariness as the best provision, we will now explain the third principle. This principle is an answer to the question: How far can God-wariness take us?

Undoubtedly, some provisions run out in the beginning of the journey while others last only half-way. The question is to find out how far God-wariness—the provision for this journey—can take us. What can be gathered from the noble Qur'ān is that God-wariness stays with the wayfarer until the meeting with God (which is the end of the journey). In other words, God-

wariness has enough endurance to be able to reach God. If this is the case then the man who has God-wariness will also reach his final destination (which is the meeting with God).

God-wariness will take us to God

In the blessed Sūrah Ḥajj, when God discusses the sacrificial offering, He says:

لَن يَنَالَ اللَّـهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَـٰكِن يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنكُمْ

It is not their flesh or their blood that reaches Allah. Rather it is your God-wariness that reaches Him ... (22:37)

In other words, the meat and skin of the sacrificial animal does not reach God because they are material and bodily things [while God is not]. Therefore, they will stay in the natural world. It is only God-wariness, which is the *very spirit* of the sacrifice, which will reach God.

In the Days of Ignorance, they used to hang the meat of sacrificial animals on the walls of the Kaʿbah in order to become [spiritually] close to their idols. The blood of the sacrifice was also rubbed on the walls of the Kaʿbah. Islam, as the religion of monotheism, nullified these polytheistic rites with the following prohibition: Do not hang meat on the walls of the Kaʿbah and do not rub blood on it. That which reaches God is God-wariness not meat and blood.

The expression that the noble Qurʾān uses is precise: God-wariness, which is a specific characteristic of your soul, will reach God; not that God will accept an action performed with God-wariness. It is one thing to say:

إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّـهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

... Allah accepts only from the God-wary. (5:27)

It is quite another thing and a far higher statement to say that God-wariness itself will reach God [as in the verse, "it is your God-wariness that reaches Him (22: 37)]. In other words, there is no veil between God and God-wariness. This is because those things that are enshrouded in veils of a material and dark nature

cannot enter the imaginal world (*barzakh*), let alone those worlds that lie beyond it.

Some things have the power to fly [towards the spiritual heavens] but when they reach the higher stations and come face to face with the veils of light, they do not have the power to tear through them and soar upwards. Rather they are overcome by these powerful veils of light. Those powerful lights are the veils of radiance while the beings existing in the natural world are material veils.

To explain, there are two kinds of veils: veils of light and veils of darkness. Veils of light would include the profound intellectual sciences, such as a deep and profound intellectual matter for example; on the other hand, a wall which is heavy and of a physical nature, is an example of a material veil [and hence one of "darkness"]. Why is it that man cannot see behind a material veil? It is because the very "darkness" of this veil hinders him from doing so. Likewise, why is it that man cannot understand a profound matter? It is because a veil of light prevents him from penetrating the depths of the matter; this is similar to how the weak eye of a man does not have the power to see the sun because the intense luminosity of the sun acts as a veil.

The concept of the veils of light appears in the *Munājāt al-Shaʿbāniyyah* (the whispered prayers of the holy month of Shaʿbān) in the following passages:

إِلٰهِي هَبْ لِي كَمَالَ الانْقِطَاعِ إِلَيْكَ وَ أَنِرْ أَبْصَارَ قُلُوبِنَا بِضِيَاءِ نَظَرِهَا
إِلَيْكَ حَتَّى تَخْرِقَ أَبْصَارُ الْقُلُوبِ حُجُبَ النُّورِ فَتَصِلَ إِلَى مَعْدِنِ
الْعَظَمَةِ وَ تَصِيرَ أَرْوَاحُنَا مُعَلَّقَةً بِعِزِّ قُدْسِكَ

O God! Grant me complete separation towards You. Illuminate the eyes of our hearts with the radiance of them gazing unto You. [Let this persist] until the eyes of our hearts pierce the veils of light that they reach the treasure-trove of greatness and our souls may be connected with the dignity of your Sacred Essence.

In this prayer, the devotee asks that his heart pierce all the veils of light such that it is not blinded by the intensity of their

radiance. It wishes to say: O God! Shine your light into our souls in such a way that all of the other lights be subsumed by the light of our existence so that we may pierce the veils of light and not be veiled by them [from seeing You].

As is evident, reaching the lofty stations of spirituality can be hindered by veils of light; therefore, in order to reach those stations there is no other option for us than to light the candle of our existence with the "Light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35).

So the veils of light at some stations of perfection prevent man or one of his attributes to ascend upwards. Yet, this is not the case for God-wariness for there is no veil in its way—God-wariness pierces all the veils of light and darkness and remains up until the beatific encounter. As God says,

وَلَـٰكِن يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنكُمْ

... rather it is your God-wariness that reaches Him ... (22:37)

Moreover, this *yanāluhu* ("it will reach Him") is not like what is mentioned in the verse:

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ

... to Him ascends the good word ... (35:10)

In this latter verse, there is no implication of a meeting with God. It only speaks of *yaṣᶜadu* ("it will ascend towards Him"). As to whether it will actually reach God or not, that cannot be ascertained from this latter verse. But, with respect to God-wariness, the Qur'ān clearly states: "God-wariness will reach God." Therefore, it can be asserted that the provision of God-wariness will remain until the beatific encounter.

The God-wary will Reach God

Since God-wariness will reach God, it follows that a traveller who journeys with the provision of God-wariness will also undoubtedly reach the meeting with God. This demonstration rests on the foundation of the necessary correlation between the wayfarer and his spiritual provision (*ittihād sālik wa maslak*). Another demonstration can be presented based on the correlation

between the attribute and the attributed (*ittihād ṣifah wa mawṣūf*).

The latter demonstration can be presented in the following way: If God-wariness has the power to reach the meeting with God then certainly the soul of man who has God-wariness has the power to do the same. It is not possible that God-wariness reaches God but the God-wary not be able to. This is because God-wariness is a quality of the God-wary soul and hence is not separated from it. If this particular attribute ascends towards God then the person who possesses it will also ascend to Him. Moreover, if it reaches God then its possessor will also reach Him.

God—who has taught human beings noble teachings—has specified God-wariness as being the noble provision of the spiritual journey. He has also assured us of the ability and longevity of this provision—i.e., it will remain strong all the way to the beatific encounter. Moreover, the uniqueness of this provision is that the further it travels along the path the more it will increase. This is different from the provisions of material journeys which generally diminish the more that man travels until they eventually deplete and cease to exist. With the spiritual provisions, however, the more that man moves ahead the more spiritually alive and fruitful do his provisions become. It is like a flowing spring of water—the more it is dug, the more its water will flow out.

This is also similar to what we read during the supplication for the holy month of Ramaḍān:

وَ لاَ تَزِيدُهُ كَثْرَةُ الْعَطَاءِ إِلاَّ جوداً و كَرَماً

The abundance of His giving does not increase anything but His generosity and nobility.[1]

The meaning of the aforementioned passage is not that all treasures are with God and whenever God gives man something, these treasuries are not lessened in the least. Rather it means that the abundance of His bestowal does not increase anything other than His generosity and munificence. In other words, the more He bestows, the more it contributes to the increase of His

[1] "Du'ā al-iftitāḥ" in *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*.

bestowal. This meaning differs from the first one. Based on the second meaning, during our supplication to God, we say: O God, You are so generous that the more You bestow the more Your generosity increases.

This is like a knowledgeable man. The more he teaches, the more his knowledge increases. The more he studies and engages himself, the more of a specialist he will become. Unlike wealth, knowledge does not decrease when it is used; instead, with every use it becomes more active and enlivened.

It is true that God's essential knowledge is unlimited, and in the realm of the unlimited there is no room for increase or decrease. God's generosity, however, is unlike His knowledge in that the latter [i.e., His knowledge] lies on the level of His essence, while the former [i.e., His generosity] on the level of His acts. It is on the plane of God's acts that one can speak of increase and decrease.

Therefore, in the above-mentioned supplication, we say: O God, the more you bestow Your blessings, the more does your generosity and munificence increase. The secret of this matter is as follows: In so much as God bestows upon human beings of his blessings, by receiving His emanation, they find themselves with greater aptitudes. Further, when these aptitudes and capabilities increase, God's bestowal will also increase; this is because it is not possible for complete aptitude and capacity to exist in a person without God bestowing all that he deserves. After all, God's universal message is as follows:

وَآتَاكُم مِّن كُلِّ مَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُ

And He gave you all that you had asked Him . . . (14:34)

In other words, God has granted you whatever your aptitudes have "asked" for. It is possible for someone to ask for something verbally but not be given that which he requests. But "asking" by your aptitudes will never go unanswered. Therefore, if God Almighty were to bestow something of His grace, then those who take aid from this bestowal, the capacity of their potential will increase and they will become more receptive. When they become more receptive, new graces will reach them—albeit those graces that they accept. They will move further on the

spiritual path in that they will find themselves with greater "expansion of the heart" and they will become more perfect.

In this way, as much as God bestows, it becomes the catalyst through which His bestowal increases. The more that someone prepares for himself the divine provision, the more do his spiritual capacities increase. When this happens, God grants him greater content and more complete graces.

A Summary of the Discussion

As was mentioned earlier, God-wariness is a provision whose effect increases and never decreases the more that the God-wary human being progresses on the spiritual path. At one point, it becomes so strong that it surpasses all the angels and pierces the veils of light until it reaches the beatific encounter. If God-wariness reaches this beatific vision of "the meeting with God" then the God-wary will also meet God. The proof of this matter is the demonstrations that were previously explained which can be summarized as follows:

The first demonstration is that God-wariness is the provision of the spiritual traveller. It is not possible that this provision reach God but the traveller that sustains himself with this provision not reach Him.

The second demonstration is that God-wariness is a characteristic of the soul and cannot be separated from it. Therefore, the moment that God-wariness attains the beatific encounter, the God-wary will also attain it.

In general then, the spiritual teachers of men are noble personalities and the essence of the apprentices [who learn from them] is also noble. The teachings of the Qur'ān are replete with lessons of nobility, and finally, Paradise—which is the abode of the noble—will be given to noble human beings.

Here, the value of that tradition that has been related in the book *Ghurar wa Durar* from Imam ʿAlī—upon whom be the best of salutations of those who salute—becomes clear:

لَيْسَ عَلَى وَجْهِ الأَرْضِ أَكْرَمُ عَلَى اللّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ مِنَ النَّفْسِ الْمُطِيعَةِ لأَمْرِهِ

On the face of this earth there is no being nobler to Allah the Sublime than the soul that obeys His orders.[1]

This means that on the face of the earth there is no being that is more noble in the eyes of God than the righteous servant of God. If a soul were to be obedient to God, then not only is it considered noble but no other being will compare to it in its nobility. The soul that is obedient to God is nobler than everything else. It is for this reason that God says that everything other than God has been created for man since they too must traverse the path to nobility.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

[1] *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, v. 5, no. 7530, p. 92 (Tehran University Print).

Session Four

A Reminder

Our discussion was about the nobility of man in the noble Qur'ān. After having introduced God-wariness as the pole around which nobility revolves, God says that man is on a journey to God. It is not possible for man to escape being on this journey or that man not meet God at some point. Rather, this journey is a necessity for every human being. He always goes from one realm of existence to another and the end of this journey is the meeting with the Truth. There can be no doubt or exception to these two principles—the necessity of man's journey and the fact that the end of this journey is the meeting with God. As the Qur'ān says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him. (84:6)

Therefore, every human being is by necessity a traveller.

Now, there is a reference point for every traveller—a destination at which he will arrive. When he reaches it, his journey comes to an end. The only destination in man's journey is the meeting with God; there is no other destination. There is not a man on earth who will travel to someone or something other than God; rather, all are travelling towards Him whether they are believers or unbelievers. Since the unbelievers have not taken their provision for this journey they will encounter the Divine Majesty (*liqā' Jalāl*) and wrath. This is while they will say:

رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا

... Our Lord! We have seen and heard... (32:12)[1]

[1] This is in reference to those who denied the encounter with their Lord as explained in the verses preceding and following the aforementioned verse: "They say, 'When we have been lost in the dust, shall we be indeed created anew?' Rather they disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord (*bal hum bi liqā rabbihim kāfirūn*). Say, 'You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you. Then you will be brought back to your Lord.' Were you to see when the guilty hang their heads before their Lord [confessing],

As for the believers, since they possess the appropriate provision, they will encounter the Divine Beauty (*liqā' Jamāl*) and arrive at His Mercy.

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

Some faces will be fresh on that day, looking at their Lord. (75:22-23)

In order for the traveller to reach his destination safely, a provision has been specified for him, and that is God-wariness. Aside from being a provision, God-wariness is also the factor that brings about nobility. Hence, we can say that only the noble will reach the proper destination. God has said the following regarding God-wariness:

وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ

... and take provision, for indeed the best provision is God-wariness... (2:197)

You must take a provision for yourselves and the best provision is God-wariness. If someone does not have God-wariness then he has no provision [for his spiritual journey]. When he has no provision then not only is he disliked by God but his actions are also not accepted by Him. Since God Himself is noble, He is not fond of ignoble actions nor ignoble individuals. If an action is [spiritually] ignoble then it will not be able to soar towards God. Likewise, even if an action is good in itself but the performer is himself ignoble, then his action will also not ascend towards God, for God says:

إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّـهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

... Allah accepts only from the God-wary. (5:27)

As was mentioned before, the God-wary are the noble ones. Since God-wariness causes nobility then those who are not God-

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'Our Lord! We have seen and heard. Send us back so that we may act righteously. Indeed we are [now] convinced.' Had We wished We would have given every soul its guidance, but My word became due [against the defiant]: 'Surely I will fill hell with all the [guilty] jinn and humans.' So taste [the punishment] for your having forgotten the encounter of this day of yours. We [too] have forgotten you. Taste the everlasting punishment because of what you used to do." (32:10-14).

wary are not noble. Therefore, using the above verse we can say that God does not accept actions from those who are lacking in nobility.

God-wariness and the God-wary will reach God

It has been mentioned that the provision that will take man to God is God-wariness. In the previous session, by referring to two verses of the noble Qur'ān, we presented two proofs to demonstrate that both God-wariness and the God-wary will reach God. In one verse, the Qur'ān states:

لَن يَنَالَ اللَّـهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَـٰكِن يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنكُمْ

It is not their flesh or their blood that reaches Allah. Rather it is your God-wariness that reaches Him ... (22:37)

In other words, the flesh and the blood of this sacrificial animal will not reach God. Rather the God-wariness with which this sacrifice was performed—which is the *spirit* of this action—will reach God. Now, if God-wariness reaches God then certainly the God-wary will also reach God. This was explained in the following manner: since God-wariness is an attribute of the soul, if this attribute were to soar up towards the celestial realm, then certainly the person who possesses this attribute will also ascend along with it. The principle behind this is that an attribute, when it is devoid of that which it is attributed to, does not have an independent existence or particular ruling. Therefore, by considering (1) the necessary correlation between God-wariness and the God-wary and (2) the fact that God-wariness will reach God, we can clearly determine the position of the God-wary.

In another verse, the Qur'ān states:

وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ

... and take provision, for indeed the best provision is God-wariness... (2:197)

From this verse, we can extrapolate the position of God-wariness. As stated, God-wariness is the provision of the spiritual

traveller. Since we know [from previously mentioned verses] that the traveller will encounter God, then we can conclude that God-wariness will also reach God. Therefore, by considering (1) the necessary correlation between God-wariness and the God-wary and (2) the fact that the traveller who is a God-wary person will encounter God, we can clarify the position of God-wariness itself.

In general, God-wariness is a provision that will take man towards his destination. To the extent that man comes close to his destination (*maqṣad*), he will also be able to take benefit from his object of aspiration (*maqṣūd*)—which is none other than God Almighty.

Discernment is the Product of God-wariness

In the blessed Surah Anfāl, it appears that the benefit that God gives to the distinguished human beings who are moving towards God by means of God-wariness is intuitive knowledge and inner wisdom.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

O you who have faith! If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you ... (8:29)

Discernment (*furqān*) is that inner light by means of which good is distinguished from evil. The God-wary individual who has been blessed with discernment will not be bewildered when he wants to choose a path. Sometimes a man is puzzled when he tries to distinguish what is obligatory on him. Often man is confused when he wants to differentiate the good from evil. But the Qur'ān says that if a person is God-wary then God will ignite this beacon [of guidance] inside of him.

Sometimes this idea is expressed in the form of a conditional statement:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

O you who have faith! If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you ... (8:29)

At other times, it is expressed differently [for example, in the imperative along with its consequence]:

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ ۖ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّـهُ

... be wary of Allah, and Allah shall teach you ... (2:282)

The person who is able to discern between truth and falsehood on the basis of God-wariness is never bewildered and will never stumble in any of his actions. The Qur'ān implies that the reason behind the inability to differentiate between truth and falsehood is the absence of God-wariness. Man will benefit from discernment in every area if he practices God-wariness in that area.

In Surah Ṭalāq, God says:

وَمَن يَتَّقِ اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّهُ مَخْرَجًا

... and whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him. (65:2)

The God-wary believer will never find himself forced into a corner in any task. This is because God has given him the power of discernment.

When God says that He will give man the power of discernment, it does not mean that He will only assist him intellectually but leave him on his own in practical affairs. The reason for this lies in the fact that discernment which does not lead to action is of no benefit. Rather, God says that He will show man the way to distinguish truth from falsehood and also place the path of salvation in front of him. Therefore, the meaning of 'discernment' in the verse, "O you who have faith! If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion/discernment for you" (8: 29), is a discernment through which one can stay away from falsehood and reach the Truth. Its result is that man will never be perplexed in anything that he does.

The continuation of the verse in Surah Ṭalāq is as follows:

وَمَن يَتَّقِ اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّهُ مَخْرَجًا وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ

... and whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him and give him sustenance from where he knows not ... (65:2-3)

God gives sustenance to the one who is God-wary in ways that he would never dream of. Of course, man has been ordered to pursue his affairs using natural and customary means; nevertheless, as a result of the implication of this verse, the believer's trust in the Unseen will be more than his reliance on the apparent: "And [God shall] give him sustenance from where he knows not..." (65: 2-3). In other words, he will benefit from the Unseen [assistance] more than the apparent. It is for this reason that when people asked the Imams regarding asceticism (as has been related in the collections of traditions), the Imams would respond: Asceticism means that you be more confident regarding what is in God's hands than what is in your own. The reason for this is that whatever is in man's hands is transient like man himself. As the Qur'ān states:

مَا عِندَكُمْ يَنفَدُ

That which is with you will be spent... (16:96)

Whatever is in the hands of God, however, is protected from perishing since change and transformation do not find way into the sanctuary of the divine Unseen treasures. Hence, the verse continues:

مَا عِندَكُمْ يَنفَدُ ۖ وَمَا عِندَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ

That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allah shall last... (16:96)

If man has authority over certain things, then in so far as he is subsumed in transience, every aspect of that which is under his authority will also be subsumed by transience. On the other hand, anything that is with God is certainly protected since God Himself is protected from any change or transformation. It is for this reason that the God-wary trusts the Unseen [causes] more than he trusts the apparent [worldly causes]. Allah confirms this when He says:

وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ

And give him sustenance from where he knows not ... (65:3)

In other words, man's sustenance will arrive from directions that he cannot predict nor can he ever imagine.

Therefore, the God-wary person is never bewildered since he has the power to discern between truth and falsehood. And due to his having received the special grace of God he is never without a means; in other words, it is not the case that after distinguishing truth from falsehood he is incapable of moving towards the truth. Therefore, God has opened the doors of salvation for such a person both intellectually and practically. Now, because the only Path [to God] and the only provision [on this path] is God-wariness, the one who lacks God-wariness is in a two-fold predicament: first, he will be confused as to what is true and what is false; and second, even if he should happen to distinguish these from each other the path to traverse on the truth will not be open to him; instead, it will remain forever closed.

The Punishment of the Impious

In the blessed Surah Yāsīn, Allah describes the impious as follows:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ أَغْلَالًا فَهِيَ إِلَى الْأَذْقَانِ فَهُم
مُّقْمَحُونَ وَجَعَلْنَا مِن بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ سَدًّا وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ سَدًّا
فَأَغْشَيْنَاهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ

Indeed We have put iron collars around their necks, which are up to the chins, so their heads are upturned. And We have put a barrier before them and a barrier behind them, then We have blindfolded them, so they do not see. (36:8-9)

Man can only know God in one of two ways, and there is no third: One is from within—i.e., through knowing oneself. It is to turn one's head so as to see oneself. The other is from without—i.e., through the formation of a world view. It is to raise one's head and look towards the heavens and the earth, to observe the beings of land and seas, and through these "signs in the horizons,"[i] to realize God.

[i] A reference to the verse: "Soon We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real"

In other words, man can know God through the inward way (i.e., the way of the heart) or the outward way (i.e., the way of reason), or both. By means of these two paths, one can distinguish truth from falsehood and then chart out a specific path to travel on. But if someone is of a base character, devoid of God-wariness and hence nobility, neither is the inward way open to him nor the outward. God explains:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ أَغْلَالًا فَهِيَ إِلَى الْأَذْقَانِ فَهُم مُّقْمَحُونَ

Indeed We have put iron collars around their necks, which are up to the chins, so their heads are upturned. (36:8)

God says that he has placed a solid piece of iron between their necks and chins such that they cannot turn their faces down in order to see themselves. Put differently, a strong piece of iron is occupying the place between their necks and their chins such that their heads are always facing upwards in the air. Due to this, they are "upturned" (*muqmaḥūn*). A man that is "upturned" is someone whose face is stuck in the air and who cannot turn it—he cannot look at his own self and question where he has come from. Hence, it is impossible for this kind of person to contemplate the inner signs that indicate his having traversed various cycles of existence and the stages that lie before him. He cannot contemplate the inner signs that verses such as the following allude to:

هَلْ أَتَىٰ عَلَى الْإِنسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُن شَيْئًا مَّذْكُورًا

Has there been for man a period of time when he was not anything worthy of mention? (76:1)

وَلْتَنظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ

... let every soul consider what it sends ahead for tomorrow... (59:18)

أَوَلَا يَذْكُرُ الْإِنسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِن قَبْلُ وَلَمْ يَكُ شَيْئًا

(41:53). The verse highlights the two means through which man can know God—from within and from without. [Ed.]

Does not man remember that We created him before when he was nothing? (19:67)

These and similar verses invite man towards knowing himself. But the person whose neck has been bound by a piece of iron simply cannot reach the knowledge of God through self-knowledge. Therefore, the path of inner-recognition is closed for him.

What of the outer path? Has it been left open? The verses in question from Surah Yāsīn [36:8-9] seems to suggest that the outer path is also closed for this person. This is because the person who chooses the outward path must either take admonition from the experiences of those in the past and from the causes of the downfall of previous nations or he must foretell events of the future. But neither of these two possibilities is open for him as the verse explains:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِن بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ سَدًّا وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ سَدًّا فَأَغْشَيْنَاهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ

And We have put a barrier before them and a barrier behind them, then We have blind-folded them, so they do not see. (36:9)

For such people, a tall barrier lies in front of them and another behind them such that neither can they see the people of the past nor those of the future. In such a situation, there is no possibility of them ever formulating a world view. The extent of their eye-sight is the distance from their eyes to the wall that has surrounded them, and hence, they are in confinement. Their life is as the Qur'ān explains:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنكًا

But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life ... (20:124)

In the two verses of Surah Yāsīn mentioned [verses 8-9], an intelligible phenomenon has been described in sensory terms by way of analogy—albeit, a brilliant and unparalleled analogy. For this individual who (1) cannot see himself and who is thus unable to spiritually rectify himself, and (2) who cannot see outside of himself and hence is unable to know God through other

things, God depicts him in the following way: We have filled his neck entirely with iron and thus he cannot turn his head down and correct himself spiritually. We have also put a tall barrier in front of his eyes and another thick one behind him. Neither can he see what is in front of him nor can he see what is behind him. This is the person who, as a result of his turning his face away from the remembrance of God, has been confined. His awareness is quite limited since the extent of his analysis of any situation is only the meagre distance that lies between him and the wall before him. This is despite the fact that, in essence, he is an eternal being and that "time lies under his feet" [i.e., he has the ability to look at the world beyond the confines of time]. Even though man can analyse events that occurred hundreds of centuries ago, these 'hundreds of centuries', in relation to 'eternity', is incomparable—eternity cannot be gauged using quantitative measures.

In general, the man who has turned his head from the remembrance of the Truth is imprisoned in the confines of his limited point of view though he surmises that what he has is a genuine world view. Sometimes God instructs us to ponder over the lives of those in the past and sometimes He tells us to have foresight, since the events of the past paves the way for the future. But the "blind" man, as God tells us, does not make use of the past experiences of others nor does he have anything saved for his [spiritual] future. He imagines that after he dies he will cease to exist. Thus he has no motive to store anything for his future. Someone who believes death to be a cessation of existence will not have anything stored up for himself after he dies.

On the other hand, the path treaded upon by the God-wary is open. He benefits from the experiences of the past and also sees his future. He is aware of the Resurrection either by means of demonstration [i.e., the outer path] or by means of direct witnessing [i.e., the inner path]. Moreover, he sees himself and, hence, knows his own weaknesses. In his whispered conversations with His Lord, he says, "You are the Creator and I am the created; You are the Owner and I am the owned; You are the Lord and I am the vassal ... You are the Self-Sufficient and I am

the needy."[1] Since he sees himself as needy and ephemeral, he cries out to God [for help].

But the person who does not see himself as needy and ephemeral will find his way obstructed in one of two ways: Either he thinks he will remain forever:

أَخْلَدَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ

... he clung to the Earth [thinking that it will remain] ... (7:176)

يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ

He supposes his wealth will make him immortal! (104:3)

Or he considers the world to be finite and says, "just as I will cease to exist, so too will this system of existence come to an end. Neither will I remain nor the world of existence." For such an individual who does not have God-wariness, neither will he find a way to benefit from history nor will he find a way to prepare a provision for the future.

God-wariness is the Provision of the Wayfarers on the Path of Nobility

God-wariness is a combination of knowledge and action. Knowledge casts its influence upon action, and action makes man God-wary under the auspices of knowledge. This God-wariness will be the provision of the traveller who will make use of its proper awareness.

Now, because the path of knowledge is closed to some people, the path of action will also be closed to them. This is because if someone wants to act, he must have knowledge and an understanding of how to act. Of course, the mere fact that a person has knowledge does not mean that he will act [according to it], but the point that is made here is that it is not possible for someone to act [in a proper manner] without having knowledge. This is because the individual, who is deprived of knowledge, cannot see in any direction so as to move towards it.

It is for this reason that the God-wary person does not succumb to the various upheavals of time. The impious one,

[1] "Duʿā yastashīr" in *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*.

however, is confined within the boundaries of his two towering walls. He does not see anything of importance, his sight being limited to the narrow world of nature. His perspective, therefore, is a material perspective. God says that he who is impious will get stranded on the way. This is because if one does not have the [appropriate] provision, he will naturally be left stranded halfway, and if it is on account of his own shortcoming, he will be taken to be punished.

خُذُوهُ فَغُلُّوهُ

[The angels will be told:] 'Seize him, and fetter him! (69:30)

In contrast, he who has the provision for the journey will be welcomed as such:

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ

... Peace be to you! You are welcome! Enter it to remain [forever]. (39:73)

There is a difference between the traveller who has a provision and who, therefore, will reach his destination and the traveller who gets stranded on the way because he does not have a provision. God tells the angels with regard to the latter: "Seize him, and fetter him!" (69:30). The angels of wrath are delegated to vehemently take him away as he is driven (*sawq*) from behind while being beaten every so often:

وَنَسُوقُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ وِرْدًا

And drive the guilty as a thirsty herd towards hell. (19:86)

With regard to the former group—i.e., those destined for heaven—God says that they will be welcomed by the angels. In fact, in another part of the Qur'ān a derivation of the same root word *sawq* has been used for those destined for Paradise where the angels direct the people of heaven from behind;[1] there, however, the term *sawq* has the meaning of escorting. So when the

[1] A reference to the term *sīqa* ("to be lead") from the same root word *sawq* in verse 73 of Surah Zumar (chap. 39): "Those who are wary of their Lord will be lead (*sīqa*) to Paradise in throngs. When they reach it, and its gates are opened, its keepers will say to them, 'Peace be to you! You are welcome! Enter it to remain [forever].'" [Ed.]

angels follow the people of heaven, they do so as a sign of respect and in the sense of escorting them, but when they follow the sinners, they act like a herdsman who constantly strikes his flock from behind. There is a vast difference, therefore, between these two Qur'ānic expressions as to how the angels follow the believers and how they follow the sinners: the angels are like escorts for the believers and are like herders driving a flock of sheep for the sinners.

As a final note, we can say that if God-wariness is the provision of the spiritual traveller, then it is clear that his journey will be "a journey of nobility." A journey is often named by a particular feature of it (such as its necessary provision), just as it is named by its path or destination. In either of the latter cases, since both the path and the destination involve nobility, the journey towards God will be "a journey of nobility."

Knowledge and Understanding derive from God-wariness

The benefit that the God-wary person gains [on account of his God-wariness] is inner mystic knowledge. In the Qur'ān, this benefit from God-wariness is sometimes expressed in the form of a clear conditional statement such as in the verse from Surah Anfāl:

إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

... If you are God-wary then God will grant you discernment ... (8:29)

At other times, although it may not appear in the form of a conditional statement, the context of the verse as a whole points to the fact that God-wariness plays an effective role in the development of insight and self-knowledge. An example of this can be found in the blessed Surah Baqarah:

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ ۖ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّـهُ ۗ وَاللَّـهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

... Be wary of Allah and Allah shall teach you, and Allah has knowledge of all things. (2:282)

In other words, if you are God-wary then God will make you knowledgeable and He is aware of everything. Also, since God

is noble and since a noble teacher will never accept a base student in his special classes, it is not possible that God teaches the class of nobility to those who are ignoble.

In the preceding discussions it became clear that at the onset of revelation, God described Himself as the most-noble, and in this way, He inaugurated the class on nobility.

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

Read, and your Lord is the most-Noble, who taught by the pen. (96:3-4)

If God the most-Noble has announced that He will now accept apprentices, then His apprentices must also be noble. He will absolutely not allow those who are ignoble entry into his special classes. This idea is sometimes explained [in the Qur'ān] by how the instructor (i.e., God) is described and sometimes by how the apprentice (i.e., the God-wary) is described. It is possible that an ignoble person be busy all his life obtaining knowledge but in the end dies as a common person. In other words, because of the fact that he did not become noble despite his studies, he will have lost all that he learnt in his old age. Thus, at the time of death he will not travel [to the next world] accompanied by knowledge because without God-wariness, knowledge cannot act as a provision.

The role of God-wariness in cultivating true knowledge is not limited to a particular science:

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۖ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ

... ... Be wary of Allah and Allah shall teach you ... (2:282)

The general connotation of the above verse is that in whatever field you wish to become an expert, ultimately, it is God who will give you knowledge. If you choose to traverse the path of nobility, then you will make progress in that very field. Moreover, unlike ordinary human beings, God is not just an expert in only one field. In fact, in the same verse, God says:

وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

... Allah has knowledge of all things. (2:282)

So if an individual practices God-wariness in any field of knowledge then he will be both noble and an apprentice of God, and consequently, God will make the necessary arrangements for him to excel in that field.

Additionally, just as God-wariness facilitates divine instruction, it is also the vehicle through which our deeds are accepted:

إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّـهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

... Allah only accepts from the God-wary. (5:27)

Just as the divine sciences pour down upon the person with God-wariness, the deeds of such a person ascend upwards and are accepted by God by the grace of this very quality of God-wariness. If someone is God-wary then his deeds will soar upwards to God and they will be accepted by Him. And if God accepts the deeds of someone, then certainly He will also accept the performer of those deeds.

To explain, the necessary ontological correlation between deeds and the performer of those deeds as well as their inseparability from each other necessitates the fact that if deeds are to ascend, the performer of those deeds must also ascend. Man's deeds are not a chain of accidents that can be detached from him since a large portion of them are habits (*malakah*) of the soul. So if God accept those habits that have become second nature to the performer then He will certainly accept the soul of that person who is attributed with those habits. And if those habits of the soul are well-pleasing to God, then the soul itself [which is the locus of those habits] will also be well-pleasing to Him. This will continue until the entire substance of the soul becomes well-pleasing to and accepted by God.

The Qur'ānic expression "Allah only accepts from the God-wary" (5:27) has been transmitted in the words of the son of Adam (*'a*) [Abel] in the blessed Surah Mā'idah after the phrase:

وَاتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ ابْنَيْ آدَمَ بِالْحَقِّ إِذْ قَرَّبَا قُرْبَانًا

Relate to them truly the account of Adam's two sons. When the two of them offered an offering ... (5:27)

If God quotes someone and He is not pleased with it then He will certainly reject it [after recounting it]. The Qur'ān is not a

book of stories that it should narrate from just any person while not concerning itself with the correctness or incorrectness of its contents. Rather, if it relates something from someone which happens to be a true statement, then either it will accept it through silence or will clearly affirm it in words. Conversely, if the statement happens to be false, it will certainly reject it. In this case, not only has the Qur'ān not rejected the speech of the righteous son of Adam (*ʿa*) but it has in fact confirmed it in other places as well.

The bulk of the matter is that man correctly learns God-wariness and nobility from God and when he has done so, he will become His student. Once this happens, he will then [be ready to] learn the special sciences from Him.

God-wariness is a Means

In the blessed Surah Mā'idah, God says that man needs a means in order to reach lofty goals:

وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ

... Seek the means of recourse to Him ... (5:35)

But when we want to specify the referents of this "means" then we must not resort to the non-conditionality of the verse.[4] From the onset, we must specify what things are means and what things are not. Then we can resort to the generality or non-conditionality of the verse "seek the means of recourse to Him."

In other words, if it is proven for us that prayer is a good means to draw near to God then we can use the generality of the verse "Seek the means of recourse to Him" to conclude that we must ascend to God by means of prayers. Fasting, charity, and seeking nearness to the infallible and purified Ahl al-Bayt (*ʿa*) are also good means. This is because it has been proven both intellectually and by the traditions that they are means to draw close to God. Anything that has been proven to be a means can be subsumed under this major universal premise. Otherwise, if something has not been proven to be a means, then we cannot use this verse to prove that it is a means to draw close to God.

Now, in the same verse wherein God invites us to seek a means for ourselves, God has also invited us towards God-wariness:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَجَاهِدُوا فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah, and seek the means of recourse to Him, and struggle/wage jihad in His way, so that you may be felicitous. (5:35)

It can be understood from this that God-wariness is an effective means [to reach God] as is struggling in His way (*jihād*). In fact, struggling in the way of God is one of the best means to draw close to Him since in the traditions of the holy Infallibles (ᶜa) and the sayings of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) it has been narrated that God has made struggling a good means [to draw close to Him].

These acts and states are means and concrete ways to reach God. The basis of the matter is for man to benefit from this inner God-wariness. Not everyone has the opportunity to undergo formal schooling. Through God-wariness, however, such individuals may benefit from the ability to discern between truth and falsehood. After all, the most common way [to God] is the way of the heart that is possible for everyone under all conditions. For someone who is a farmer, cattleman, or artisan, and who has never studied in a university or seminary, the path to acquire this provision (i.e., God-wariness) is still wide open. As God says:

إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

... if you are God-wary then God will grant you discernment ... (8:29)

This is one of the "mothers" of all the verses of the noble Qurʾān. God says to everyone—regardless of whether they have been given the opportunity to study formally or whether they have absolutely no access to any type of formal education—that if they become God-wary, a vast scholastic seminary will blossom in their hearts and that He will be the one to establish this scholastic seminary for them. Oceans of wisdom will rage inside them. They will not be bewildered in any matter for they will be

able to distinguish truth from falsehood accurately. This is because God, who is their teacher, knows everything and He is always with them:

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ

... He is with you wherever you may be... (57:4)

Many of us may be considered "educated" or in the process of becoming so, yet when it comes to determining our responsibility, we find ourselves confused. This confusion and bewilderment stems from the fact that in our attempt to progress, we did not do so in a noble manner. In the above-mentioned blessed verse, however, God says that the God-wary individual is rewarded with the light of guidance and discernment, meaning that God gives him the power to understand what his responsibility is.

Heaven: a Further Result of God-wariness

The result of God-wariness is not only that we become noble and that we learn the divine sciences; rather, Paradise itself, with all its glory and magnificence, is awaiting the God-wary. But the God-wary person actually leaves behind this prepared heaven—i.e., at the same time that he benefits from this heaven that is awaiting him, he ascends beyond it.

To explain, consider the following verses:

وَأُزْلِفَتِ الْجَنَّةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

And Paradise will be brought near for the God-wary. (26:90)

مَّثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعِدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۖ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ أُكُلُهَا دَائِمٌ وَظِلُّهَا ۚ تِلْكَ عُقْبَى الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوا ۖ وَعُقْبَى الْكَافِرِينَ النَّارُ

A likeness of the paradise promised to the God-wary: streams run in it, its fruits and shade are everlasting. Such is the requital of those who are God-wary; and the requital of the faithless is the Fire. (13:35)

From these verses, the following can be extrapolated: Heaven presently exists and has been beautified for the believers. All of its aspects are primed, waiting for the patrons of God-wariness.

Apart from the transmitted evidence pointing to this fact, a rational proof for the present actualization of heaven can be conveyed as follows: The fulfilment of a journey does not make sense without the existence of a destination. In other words, it is not possible that an actualized movement be directed towards a non-existing entity [and hence, if the spiritual wayfarer is journeying towards heaven, it must exist for him to be able to move towards it].

In summary, therefore, we can say that the noble and God-wary man moves towards a heaven that presently exists, that is ready for him, and that is exceedingly extensive:

وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

And hasten towards your Lord's forgiveness and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-wary. (3:133)

This immeasurable heaven is only an example of a higher heaven towards which the God-wary are moving. What is that other heaven? Only God knows. The former heaven is only a sign of that distant destination as the verse in the blessed Surah Ra'd suggests:

مَّثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعِدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۖ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ أُكُلُهَا دَائِمٌ وَظِلُّهَا ۚ تِلْكَ عُقْبَى الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوا ۖ وَّعُقْبَى الْكَافِرِينَ النَّارُ

A likeness of the paradise promised to the God-wary: streams run in it, its fruits and shade are everlasting. Such is the requital of those who are God-wary; and the requital of the faithless is the Fire. (13:35)

Here God says that the likeness (*mathal*) of the heaven promised to the people of God-wariness is a heaven where "streams run in it." In other words, this sensory heaven is like that special

heaven allocated for the God-wary, but it is not that heaven itself. Of what nature is that special heaven? Only God knows. What heaven does the God-wary person move towards? Only God knows.

This lower heaven which we can comprehend and which contains sensory pleasures is just on the way [to the real Heaven]. Undoubtedly, in the Hereafter (after death), the God-wary believer will go to this sensory heaven, but this is one of his lower stations. In order to describe that loftier station, the Qur'ān says: "The *likeness* of the paradise promised to the God-wary: streams run in it..." (13: 35). In other words, this higher heaven is *like* the heaven that has been promised to the God-wary. It is not that heaven itself. The heaven that has been promised to the God-wary could be of the following:

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

Then enter among My servants! And enter My Paradise! (89:29-30)

If this is the case, then there is no place for trees and seas there. The heaven with trees is just on the way. It is simply a manifestation of the heaven of beatific encounter (*liqā'*). Therefore, it becomes clear that this outward, sensory, and corporal heaven has been set up on the path of the God-wary—in truth, it is only a mid-way reception.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

Session Five

A Reminder

Our discussion was about the nobility of man according to the noble Qur'ān. In the preceding discussions, it was mentioned that God has created man as an essentially noble species. He has given him an essential superiority as well as a relative one, and the two differ from one another. He has said the following concerning man's essential nobility:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

Certainly We have ennobled the Children of Adam ... (17:70)

And he has said the following regarding man's relative superiority:

وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا

... and given them an advantage over many of those We have created ... (17:70)

Moreover, the standard of nobility, which was God-wariness, was clearly mentioned. As for the conditions under which nobility is nurtured as well as the impediments to it, these were also explained to a certain extent.

The Nobility of the Children of Adam

What will be presented in this section is whether or not God has given the same honour and great station to the progeny of Adam that He had given to their father.

Let us review the words of Satan [after having refused to prostrate before Adam]:

أَرَأَيْتَكَ هَـٰذَا الَّذِي كَرَّمْتَ عَلَيَّ لَئِنْ أَخَّرْتَنِ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لَأَحْتَنِكَنَّ ذُرِّيَّتَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

'Do You see this one whom You have ennobled above me? If You respite me until the Day of Resurrection, I will surely destroy his progeny, [all] except a few.' (17:62)

Satan's argument can be paraphrased as such: I rebelled against the command to prostrate to this being that you have ennobled over me and thus I felt Your wrath. But I will misguide his posterity.

From this verse we can understand that the thing that has been ennobled by God is not simply Adam (*ʿa*) the person; rather, it is humanity as a whole. Anyone who reaches this station becomes honourable. The angels feel humble before him and the satanic forces do not have the power to penetrate his being. When God recalls the story of Adam, He says that He blew into him of His spirit.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّن صَلْصَالٍ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to create a human out of a dry clay [drawn] from an aging mud. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him.' (15:28-29)

In this verse, the part of man's existence that has to do with his body has been related to mud while God relates man's spirit to Himself. Although both mud and spirit belong to God [that is to say that both have been created by Him], nevertheless, God associated only the spirit to Himself. It can be presumed, then, that Adam carries with him nobility since the divine spirit was infused into him, and this very infusion of the divine spirit was the reason why he was made the object of [the angels'] prostration.

Although the above-mentioned verse cannot be used to show that the children of Adam also benefit from the divine spirit and although God has not explicitly mentioned that He has bestowed His spirit upon them, nevertheless, by carefully examining verses 7-9 of Surah Sajdah, this idea can be deduced:

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ۖ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنسَانِ مِن طِينٍ
ثُمَّ جَعَلَ نَسْلَهُ مِن سُلَالَةٍ مِّن مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ
مِن رُّوحِهِ

Who perfected everything that He created, and commenced man's creation from clay. Then He made his progeny from an extract of a base fluid. Then He proportioned him and breathed into him of His spirit ... (32:7-9)

It is true that in the last verse the "breathing of the spirit" is with regard to Adam [and not his descendants]—i.e., God says that He gave His spirit to the first human being; He did not say that He gave His spirit to the descendants of Adam. Nevertheless, before bringing up the issue of the "breathing of the spirit" [in verse 9], God brings up the topic of Adam's progeny [in verse 8]—i.e., He says that the origin of man is clay and the progeny of man is from an extract of a base fluid; thereupon, God says that He gave man of His spirit.

In other words, God first mentions the origin of man and his posterity and then He mentions the "breathing of the spirit." This signifies the fact that the progeny of Adam possess the divine spirit in much the same way as Adam does; hence, the basis of Adam's nobility as well as his progeny's nobility is that same divine spirit. It is after having created man and hence infusing him with this divine spirit that God says:

فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّـهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ

So blessed is Allah, the best of creators! (23:14)

The Divine Spirit is what Distinguishes Man

Before the stage where man becomes man, all of the biological processes that take place in him are aspects that he shares in common with other animals. In other words, with regard to the process where the sperm exits from "between the loins and the breast-bones"[1] and settles in the womb and the process where the "drop of fluid" becomes a "clinging mass" and then a

[1] A reference to the Qur'ānic verses: "He was created from an effusing fluid which issues from between the loins and the breast-bones." (86:6-7)

"fleshy tissue"[i] and finally an embryo, these are all stages common to both man and animal. From this point of view, there is no difference between man and other animals. Further, the transformation where the embryo which has a vegetative soul slowly begins to acquire an animal soul is also something that takes place in both man and animal. The distinction, however, that separates man from other animals is the divine spirit within him. God says:

ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ ۚ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ

Then We produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators! (23:14)

With regard to this verse, the following question can be posed: What stage of creation does this attribute of God—i.e., his being the "best of creators"—refer to? Has God not described himself as "the creator of all things" (13:16)? Yet for no other creation—whether it be the immaterial beings (such as the angels) or the material ones—has he used the phrase "so blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (23:14). It is only with regard to man, and only after the effusion of the spirit and the "new creation", that God says, "then We produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (23: 14).

Is God's quality of being "blessed" related to the fact that He transformed a "drop of fluid" into a "clinging mass"? Is it because he transformed a "clinging mass" into a "fleshy tissue"? Is it because he transformed a "fleshy tissue" into an embryo? Is it because he turned inanimate matter into a vegetative soul and then into an animal soul? This is not the case since these types of changes are found in many other animals [yet God has not used the same expression with regard to them].

From the phrase, "then We produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (23:14), it can

[i] A reference to the Qur'ānic verse: "Then We created the drop of fluid as a clinging mass. Then We created the clinging mass as a fleshy tissue. Then We created the fleshy tissue as bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (23:14)

be deduced that God being "blessed" is not because of the creation of man's material body, nor does it have to do with man's vegetative soul, nor does it have to do with man's animal soul; rather, it has to do with man's humanity—that element which makes him human. It is this stage of humanity that is the reason for the angels' prostration before him, the cause which makes him nobler than other beings, and the basis of why his nobility is a part of his essence.

The Station of Humanity: Acquired or Inherent?

Does everyone possess this humanity at the beginning of their creation or is it something that must be obtained by them? Put differently, is everyone at the onset of their creation human beings in actuality (*bi al-fiʿl*) or are they human beings only in potentiality (*bi al-quwwah*)?

According to the Qurʾān, it is true that everyone has the potential to become human beings but it is not true that all individuals are human beings in actuality. Each individual is a potential human being at the onset of his creation; hence, he is also noble in potentiality and *not* in actuality. Of course, he may choose to traverse the path of nobility and become a human being in actuality. In fact, the noble Qurʾān [helps him in this regard, for it] has clearly showed him this path and has even stipulated its conditions. Ultimately, man is free to travel on this path—i.e., he is not compelled to obey [God] nor is he forced to sin [against Him]. In relation to obedience and sin, he is equally free to choose between them. This is confirmed by the Qurʾānic verses:

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ

And have we not shown him the two paths [of good and evil]? (90:10)

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا

Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful. (76:3)

Wretchedness is not a Path of Perfection

In the way that man is equally free to choose between obedience and disobedience, can the same be said regarding his relation to the outcome of obedience—which is felicity—and the consequence of disobedience—which is wretchedness? In other words, can we consider both felicity and wretchedness as equal existential perfections for man [i.e., in so far as man can choose to traverse either path equally, does that entail that the destinations have the same ontological status?].

If it is the case that man's relation to felicity and wretchedness is the same and that they are both considered existential perfections for him (and he is existentially related to them in a similar manner), then if he were to reach the end of either of the two, he will have reached its perfection, in which case there would be no point calling one 'felicity' and the other 'wretchedness'. However, the very fact that one of them is 'felicitous' while the other is 'wretched' implies that even though man is equally free to choose between obedience and disobedience, his predilection, his nature, and his initial preference is predisposed to one side over the other. In other words, the direction of man's spirit and countenance has been created to face only perfection, though he has the ability to turn his face from that direction and to be diverted onto a remote course.

The point is that he has not been created at a crossroads where both choices are equal in relation to him; rather, he has been placed on a particular path [leading] towards his existential perfection such that if he turns his back to it, he will find himself on a misdirected path. Therefore, we can say that man finds himself between moving towards perfection and turning away from it, and it is not the case that he has a choice between traversing one of two perfections.

Felicity and wretchedness are not two paths that lie before man. If in the existential order, felicity and wretchedness were two different paths [towards ontological perfection], then they would both have been felicitous and it would be false to say that one was "felicitous" while the other was "wretched". If both of them lied at the end of the path to perfection, and if man had the natural ability to pursue them equally, then they would both

have been perfections for him, not that one would be a perfection while the other a deficiency.

So man finds himself on a path: ahead of him lies God and perfection while behind him lies deficiency. If he finds himself having gone astray, then he must return from this [misguidance] and traverse the path to God and perfection. In some verses, God says the following:

فَنَبَذُوهُ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ

... they cast it behind their backs ... (3:187)

That is, they threw the divine scriptures behind them. This expression points to the reality that misguidance occurs when one strays off the right path; it is not a second path unto itself [on par with the path of guidance].

Therefore, even though man is free when it comes to opting for obedience or disobedience, and even though he is equally able to do whichever of the two he wishes, nevertheless, in terms of his innate and existential nature, it is not the case that his inclination towards obedience and disobedience is equal or that whichever of the two paths he opts for will lead to his existential perfection; rather, only one path [i.e., that of felicity] is more suited to his condition such that the more he traverses it, the more will he gain pleasure from it; the other path [i.e., that of wretchedness], on the contrary, is not suited to his condition and the more he traverses down that path, the more he will become entangled, tormented, and punished.

From this it can be deduced that contrary to the correct path [of obedience], the path of sin is not a true path for man such that his relation to both becomes equal. In this way, he resembles a thirsty man who though he may have freedom to drink pure and fresh water or to choose poisoned water, his inclination towards both is not equal; he is predisposed towards consuming drinking water, not poison.

So when we negate predestination and resignation [of one's affairs to God], this only implies that human beings have a certain free will; it does not negate the fact that when it comes to perfection and imperfection or felicity and wretchedness, man is predisposed towards one particular side.

Religion and Fiṭrah

Man's *fiṭrah* (innate disposition) is inclined to only one side [i.e., goodness and perfection]. Innately, he does not desire sin and so if he commits it, in reality, he has forced it on his *fiṭrah*. As mentioned above, he is like a thirsty person who chooses to drink poisoned water to satisfy his thirst, and by so doing, he has forced this toxin upon his own digestive system [which naturally only seeks water].

This sheds light on the reason for the following Qur'ānic principle:

مَن جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا

Whoever brings virtue shall receive ten times its like ... (6:160)

This is because doing good deeds is in accordance with man's soul and is natural to him. When man is travelling on a road that he is naturally inclined to, he will pick up speed the more he progresses on this path. However, with regard to the one who commits evil, God has said the following:

وَمَن جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَىٰ إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا

... but whoever brings vice shall not be requited except with its like ... (6:160)

جَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا

The requital of evil is an evil like it ... (42:40)

For every step that man takes towards sin, he will fall [into wretchedness] to the same extent, not more. Why? Because committing sins is like moving against the tide. This is related to what they say about religion—i.e., it is something innate (*fiṭrī*) for man. When it is said that religion is innate for man, it does not only imply that the knowledge of religion is natural for him. This is because in addition to recognizing God innately, man also desires God innately. And since he desires God innately, the relation that he has with religion is not the same as the relation he has with infidelity.

So man is not at a crossroads where the two paths both lead to perfection. Rather, he is naturally inclined only towards perfection and nobility. It is because of this that God says that He created the human species as noble. In other words, He created man such that man only inclines towards perfection (and he does not incline solely towards imperfection nor towards both perfection and imperfection equally).

This nobility stems from that divine spirit and can be found in both Adam and his progeny. Even though it is true that in Sūrah Ḥijr, God has said, "Indeed I am going to create a human out of a dry clay [drawn] from an aging mud. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him," (15:28-29) [where He is only referring to Adam and not his progeny], God says the following in Sūrah Sajdah: "[God] commenced man's creation from clay. Then He made his progeny from an extract of a base fluid. Then He proportioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit." Before mentioning the blowing of the Sprit into man, God mentions both the original man [i.e. Adam] and his progeny [i.e., mankind]. In other words, these two only differ in their bodily compositions but do not vary from the point of view of the spirit. Their spirit, which was given to both of them, is divine in nature though the body of one was created from clay while that of the other was from an extract of a base fluid (of course, that fluid was originally from clay).

Nobility and Fiṭrah

The *fiṭrah* of man is noble. Therefore, the verse "[By Him Who] inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices" (91:8) does not imply that man has an equal relationship to both [i.e., virtues and vices]. Rather, this verse is itself testament to the fact that his relation to both is indeed not the same—on one side lies his God-wariness while on the other lies his immorality; hence, on one side lies his perfection while on the other lies his imperfection. [It is true that] his knowledge of both and his ability to choose either one is equal. Nevertheless, his capabilities and natural inclination with respect to both are not equal.

This is the meaning of the nobility of the soul and this nobility must be actualized by God-wariness. God-wariness is also one of the perfections of the wayfarers on the Path of Truth. If someone is not apt to spiritual wayfaring then he cannot have God-wariness since God-wariness means to keep a distance from those highway bandits [that want to attack the spiritual wayfarer in his quest to God]. If someone is not exposed to wayfaring, there is no question of being ambushed [since he is not even on the path]. If someone is not exposed to wayfaring, there is no question of sustaining loss. Hence, such a person will not have God-wariness [for God-wariness is to safeguard oneself from these dangers when they are real]. God-wariness is the means of wayfaring. It is with this in mind that God says:

وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ

... and take provision, for indeed the best provision is God-wariness ... (2:197)

God-wariness has to do with the man who is travelling. If someone is not a spiritual wayfarer, he will not need God-wariness, and consequently, neither will he have nobility.

In summary, the human species is noble but his nobility is only due to his human spirit. Moreover, this spirit is not actualized in all human beings; rather, man must strive to realize it and to transform the potentiality of nobility that lies latent within him into an actuality. If however, he chooses to move in the opposite direction, then he will have buried his inherent capacity to achieve this nobility:

وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّاهَا

And one who buries it fails. (91:10)

In other words, he will have entombed and buried that same spirit that could have achieved nobility.

Therefore, man is not noble in actuality. If, like the angels, he was noble from the outset then he would not be threatened by highway bandits nor would he be responsible for traversing the path that lay before him. Rather, man is potentially noble and the only way he can actualize this potentiality is through God-wariness.

For this reason, we must differentiate between the following two issues: from the point of view that man has free will, his relation to virtue and vice is the same; however, from the ontological point of view, his relation to perfection and imperfection or felicity and wretchedness is not equal—that which is in consonance with his innate disposition is traversing towards perfection, and it is precisely because of this that God has said:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me. (51:56)

In other words, God created human beings with an inclination towards obedience and existential perfection. If it was true that man's relation to good and evil was the same, then just as the felicitous will enjoy heaven, the condemned should also enjoy hell while this is clearly not so. The fact that one of them is pleasant while the other is not implies that man's innate disposition and his essential nature is not indifferent to both sides [and that he has a preference towards one].

The Role of Satan

In the blessed Sūrah Isrā', God has related the enmity of Satan in the following way. He says that when He gave the order to make obeisance to Adam, the angels obeyed while Satan did not. Satan's comments were as follows:

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَكَ هَـٰذَا الَّذِي كَرَّمْتَ عَلَيَّ لَئِنْ أَخَّرْتَنِ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لَأَحْتَنِكَنَّ ذُرِّيَّتَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

He said, 'Do You see this one whom You have ennobled above me? If You respite me until the Day of Resurrection, I will surely bring his progeny under my sway, [all] except a few.' (17:62)

It is as if Satan is saying: "I certainly will leash (*la-aḥtanikanna*) this person that You have honoured and ennobled above me ... I will take his harness and have it under my control ... I will take his reins from him."

When Satan says that God has honoured Adam over him, he is not referring to a specific individual per se; rather, his contention is with the human species as such. It is as if he is saying, "You have honoured this species above me; therefore, I will be in constant war with the human race until the end."

Satan does not have an issue with other animals. Therefore, if a man falls from the lofty peaks of humanity, he will have handed over his reins (*iḥtināk*) to Satan. To rein an animal means to place a bridle over its head and to harness it with a pair of straps; by so doing, one gains mastery over it. In reality, Satan is saying this: "I will take a hold of the reins of the progeny of this being that You have ennobled over me. It is not the case that I will go looking for someone else to dominate. No, my focus lies with this very person that you have ennobled and honoured over me, and it is him that I will rein in."

This honour is nothing but the station of humanity. Hence, when it is said that God, the most-Noble, gives lessons of nobility, what is meant is that He gives lessons regarding essential humanity. Therefore, the focus of the Qur'ān and other heavenly scriptures is to transform ostensibly "human" societies—composed of individuals who are only potentially human—into ones composed of true human beings.

When it is said that heaven is the habitat of the noble, what it means is that the essence of humanity will be manifested there. When God remembers the inhabitants of heaven, He says:

اولَـٰئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُّكْرَمُونَ

They will be in gardens, held in honour. (70:35)

This does not mean that God will honour them in that place; rather, the honour and nobility that they already possessed will become apparent there. The effects of their nobleness will be manifested in heaven.

Therefore, man is a being that has the potential to actualize his humanity and truly become noble. The relation that man has with transgression and piety is not the same and man naturally inclines only to the latter. Even though he may be free to choose whatever path he so desires, his relation to nobility and ignobleness is by far not the same. Rather, one of them is an ascent

and is in consonance with his innate disposition, while the other is a descent and stands opposed to his innate disposition.

According to the teachings of the noble Qur'ān, man does not stand still in the midst of his journey to God and there is nothing that stops him on this path. Rather, he is constantly in motion—if he does not become noble, he will, like Satan himself, become disgraced. The only way that he can truly become noble is through the path of obedience. So if he does not establish himself on this path of obedience, then he will not be honoured by God. And if he is not honoured by God, he will be disgraced by Him, in which case, there is not a thing that can grant him honour or make him noble. This is because man's nobility resides in his proximity to the Truth and in his actualizing his own humanity. Now, if someone does not actualize his humanity and falls from its station, then he will be transformed into an animal. And God has not ennobled the station of animality.

Therefore, the verse that ends with, "So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (23:14) is, in reality, a promise. In other words, it is telling mankind that they can reach a station wherein the spirit may be granted to them. When that happens, God will say of their being: "So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!"

God's Blessedness is an Attribute of His Acts

Since the statement "so blessed is Allah" is an attribute of His acts, it can be derived from the act itself. In this case, the verse intends to say that man will become the blessing of God. God's "blessedness" is not part of his essential attributes, which have always existed and continue to do so in all their perfections. An attribute of an act is derived on the plane of action. In reality, God's attributes on the plane of action are the acts themselves not the agent. Therefore, it is man that is blessed [since he is the outcome of an act of God, the "Blessed"]. This is the reason why every previous Imam says the following when a subsequent Imam is born: "There was never a new-born more blessed than him!" When Imam Jawād was born, Imam Riḍā said the following concerning him: "This new-born is such that no other new-born has come into this world greater in blessedness than him."[i]

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[i] "Bāb al-ishārah wa al-naṣṣ ʿalā abī Jaʿfar al-Thānī," no. 9, *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, v. 1.

In other words, the perfect human being is the source of God's blessing; [he is, therefore, a manifestation of the verse] "so blessed is Allah, the best of creators" (23:14).

So being "blessed" and "the best of creators" are not attributes of God's Essence (the attributes of His Essence are qualities such as knowledge, power, life, etc.); rather, they are attributes of His acts, and thus they are derived from the acts themselves. They are one with the acts not the agent [of those acts]. So it is man who becomes the "best of creatures" and since he is the best of creatures, his creator, God, is the "best of creators." Similarly, since man is the one endowed with blessing, God is "blessed". God's "blessedness" is derived from this act of His. The point is that so long as something is not "the best of creatures," God will not call himself "the best of creators."

Of course, the quality of being "the best of creatures" is not related to physical beauty and therefore there is no difference between Joseph the Canaanite and Bilāl the Ethiopian. External beauty is not the criteria here. It is not the case that one says to Joseph of Canaan: "you are the best of creatures," while not attributing the same to Bilāl of Ethiopia. This quality of being "the best of creatures" has nothing to do with the body—the vegetative or animal nature of man; rather, it is only connected with his humanity. Of course, other beings are also good, but *the good must give deference to the best*. It is for this reason that the angels prostrated before man—man who had actualized his humanity. Therefore, this honour is something that the average man possesses potentially though he may not have actualized it. Moreover, there is only one way that man can actualize this potential nobility, and that is to traverse the path of God-wariness.

The most essential point to realize in the present discussion is that man's relation to transgression and God-wariness is not equal (the issue of equality pertains to man's choice of paths—i.e., he is free to choose whichever path he wishes). That which man is pulled towards and that which the form of the human species naturally inclines towards is the perfection of his spirit. If this form [i.e., the essence of humanity] is not given to this matter [i.e., the ostensibly human being], then such a person will be eternally tormented. This is what is meant when they say that religion is something that is in man's innate disposition

(*fiṭrah*) and has been expressed in the Qur'ān in the following way:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I did not create the men and jinn except that they may worship Me. (51:56)

The phrase "so that they may worship" seeks to explain the road towards another destination and means: "so that they may become worshippers". Of course, as was seen earlier, worship is not the final destination; rather, it is only an intermediate goal since man worships so that he can, in the end, reach the stage of "certainty".

وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

And worship your Lord until certainty comes to you. (15:99)

Here, the word *hattā* ("until") is to convey benefit [of worshipping God]; it is not used to convey a limit or destination. It does not wish to command worship so as to arrive at certainty after which worship is no longer needed. Rather, so long as man is worshipping God, he will arrive at a place where he will gain certainty. The verse seeks to convey the idea that if you wish to enjoy this benefit and become of those who possess certainty and spiritual witnessing then you must traverse the path of worship. Therefore, worship is the intermediary goal of the wayfarers while the perfect spiritual witnessing is the last and final goal (with all the stations that have been placed for certainty).

A Summary of the Discussion

We may summarize our discussion as follows: First, man's nobility lies in his humanity. Second, this station is not specifically relegated for Adam (*ʿa*); rather, it is something that is possible for all human beings. Third, this station pertains to man's soul [not his body]. Fourth, as long as man has not actualized his humanity, he will never partake of nobility. Fifth, the sole path to this goal lies in God-wariness. Sixth, even though man's relation to transgressions and God-wariness is equal [on

the level of free-will], his potentiality towards God-wariness is innate and greater than his potentiality towards vice. These, along with other side matters, have been discussed so far.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

Session Six

A Reminder

Our discussion was about the nobility of man according to the noble Qur'ān. God has identified himself as the most-noble teacher to show that he is conducting a class of nobility. Whatever has been mentioned in the Qur'ān is a preliminary for nobility. There is no science from the common sciences of our day that is the final goal of man; rather, all of them are tools by means of which man may acquire nobility. When God says "Read, and your Lord is the most noble, who taught by the pen" (96:3-4), it implies that God, who possesses the most beautiful names, has undertaken the training of man with His honourable name "the most-Noble".

When it is said that a noble teacher is instructing students, it implies that the subject of instruction is nobility. This point was explained in our previous discussions. What is important to note is that the noble Qur'ān has expounded on the paths towards nobility, one after another, so that man may finally reach the station of nobility by traversing those paths.

God has also said that the core of nobility is God-wariness. What is God-wariness? It is to surrender that which is temporal and fleeting for the sake of that which is everlasting and eternal. Hence, nobility is not to treat the eternal and the transient as equals, nor is it to surrender the eternal for the transient; rather, the nobility of man lies in giving up that which is temporal for that which is eternal. As for what is eternal and what is temporal, God has explained this in detail.

It was also explained previously that everything (*kull shay'*) that exists is a creation of God.

اللَّـهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

... Allah is the creator of all things ... (13:16)

But God has not said the following about His other creations:

فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّـهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ

So blessed is Allah, the best of creators! (23:14)

Rather this was only said with regard to man. From this it can be deduced that man is the "best of creatures" since his Lord is the "best of creators". If there was another creature to be found higher than man then God would not have exclusively used this expression with regard to the creation of man.

Now, man's being "the best" is not something that is related to his body. This is because all animals undergo the same stages that man's body must traverse. In other words, in so far as the earth slowly transforms into food, becomes seminal fluid, takes rest in the womb, and transforms into a "clinging mass", a "fleshy tissue", and then a foetus, there is no difference between man and animal in this respect. After all, the vegetative and animal souls have been given to both human beings and other animals. Man's being "the best" is something that is solely related to "I have breathed into him of My spirit" (15:29) or "then We produced him as [yet] another creature" (23:14).

The Comprehensiveness of Man and His being the Best of Creatures

If we leave aside man's bodily faculties, the spirit that God has granted mankind also exists in the angels; yet, God did not use the expression, "so blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (23:14) in the creation of angels. This distinction shows that man's being the "best of creatures" is neither bound to his bodily, vegetative, or animal aspects nor is it related to his intellect. The intellect is a power that is shared by the angels but God has not called them the best of creatures. So that which makes man the best of creatures is something else—it is his comprehensiveness (*jāmiʿiyyah*). Hence, God, who is the creator of this "all-comprehensive being" (*kawn jāmiʿ*), is the best of creators for that reason.

Every single grace that God has bestowed upon man exists in the world in a scattered form; in man, it has been collected together. There is a particular distinction found in man that no other creature has—comprehensiveness and collectivity.

Man, therefore, who is the "all-comprehensive being", is a being that gathers in himself the perfections of the vegetable and animal kingdoms and also those of the angels. It is because of this that he is the "best of creatures", and God, who created

him, is the "best of creators". If something were to be found either in the animal kingdom or the realm of the angels that was at par with man, then God would also have said the following after its creation: "so blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (23: 14).

To summarize, God's being "the best of creators" is tied to man's being the "best of creatures" and this, in turn, is not tied to his animal or vegetative faculties since other creatures are also like man in this regards. It is also not something that is caused by the intellectual faculties in man since the angels resemble man in possessing an immaterial intellect. Rather, it is bound up with the fact that man is an "all-comprehensive existence".

Man is not Burdened when he Traverses the Path of God-wariness

It is only by traversing the path of God-wariness that man will become the "best of creatures" and the "all-comprehensive existence". Man does not feel a burden by traveling on this path of God-wariness. If we often consider religious edicts to be "obligations" or "chores" then this is because we have grown accustomed to the realm of nature. In reality, religious rules are not a burden for man nor are they cumbersome for him. In fact, many of the great wayfarers and saints who reached the age of *bulūgh* (when religious edicts become binding on them), used to say, "we have been honoured" and not "we have been tasked." In other words, "we have been honoured to now have the speech of God [through His orders and prohibitions] focussed on us."

God has explained two principles that convey the idea that traversing the spiritual path is not a burden for man nor is it cumbersome and difficult for him. The first is the following:

فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا

And inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices.
(91:8)

In other words, God revealed to man those things that are vices and transgressions and those that are manifestations of virtues

and God-wariness. Therefore, God has revealed to man both the knowledge of God-wary acts and the knowledge of the acts of transgression. Man has the power to have faith in God and to disbelieve in Him but it is not true that he has more power to have faith then he has to disbelieve.

The second principle has been expressed in the Qur'ān as such:

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ فَمَن شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِن وَمَن شَاءَ فَلْيَكْفُرْ

And say, '[This is] the truth from your Lord: let anyone who wishes believe it, and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it'... (18:29)

In other words, "you [O Prophet] tell [people] this truth [of Islam] that is from Your Lord. Whoever wishes to believe it, let him believe it, and whoever wishes to deny it, let him deny it." So, people's wills are equal in relation to disbelief and faith. This is because as man's knowledge and power is the same in relation to faith and disbelief, man's will must also be the same vis-à-vis the two.

So man's knowledge and power in relation to the beautiful and the foul is the same [i.e., he can know them equally and act them out equally]. His choice, therefore, towards the beautiful and the foul is also the same. But man's inner inclination is not the same with respect to these two. Rather, his inner being is more naturally inclined towards divine religion. This is because God has ennobled man and has given him an innate disposition towards monotheism. If it so happens that human beings have become more accustomed to the natural world then this is because they think in sensory terms. The senses and the sensory faculties are naturally close to the material world while the intellect and its faculties are distant from it. It is for this reason that corporeal things and material affairs attract humans governed by their senses. The intelligent man, however, who considers the world to have no more value than "the sneeze of

a goat"[1] is not deceived by the world and does not attach his heart to it.

The innate disposition of man seeks out immortality; hence, the fleeting things of this world do not satiate it. If man happens to become immersed in the natural world then this is for one of two reasons: (1) either he has made a mistake on the level of application—i.e., he supposes the natural world to be eternal; or (2) he has simply forgotten the everlasting life after death. In other words, either he is inflicted with compounded ignorance (*jahl murakkab*) [i.e., he has mistaken this world to be eternal] or he is inflicted with unawareness (*ghaflah*) [with regard to the Hereafter].

Man's inner being seeks immortality and he is thirsty for the "water of life". The "water of life" that we find mentioned in Persian or Arabic literature is a metaphor; it is not rain water that falls from the sky nor ground water that lies in wells or surges up through springs. There is no earthly water in the natural world that can make man immortal simply by drinking even a small bit of it. This kind of thought stands diametrically opposed to the logic of the Qur'ān when it says:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا لِبَشَرٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ الْخُلْدَ

We did not give immortality to any human before you ... (21:34)

or:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ

Every soul shall taste death ... (3:185)

Death is a reality for all; each person must necessarily die. Therefore, immortality in this world is a concept that goes against the logic of the Qur'ān. Because man naturally seeks this "water of life", God is adamant to make him understand the following: O Man! You are an immortal being but immortality cannot be contained in this world. Immortality can only be found in the acquisition of "what is with God" (*mā ʿind Allah*). Busy yourself with that which is with God that you may become

[1] A reference to the famous statement of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) where he states: "In my view, this world of yours is no better than the sneezing of a goat." *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 3. [Tr.]

noble. Since nobility lies in immortality, the mortal being—who exists at one moment and ceases to exist at another—will never be noble. Nobility lies in immortality and immortality is only with God.

Immortality and Nobility

This correspondence has been explained in various chapters of the Qur'ān in different ways. In verse 96 of Surah Naḥl, God says the following:

مَا عِندَكُمْ يَنفَدُ ۖ وَمَا عِندَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ

That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allah shall last. (16:96)

That which is within your grasp is perishable while that which is with God is everlasting. In so far as you are human beings, you are eternal; hence, do not squander this eternity that belongs to you [through your preoccupations with the fleeting world]. The eternal goods are not with anyone except God. If you seek the "water of life" then you should know that it is only with God.

In the blessed Surah Takāthur, God says the following:

الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ

Who amasses wealth and counts it over. He supposes his wealth will make him immortal! (104:2-3)

The person who is obsessed with "multiplicity" hoards wealth. He mistakenly surmises that wealth and riches are things that will allow him to live eternally. This is while there is no room for immortality in the inebriety of this world.

In verse 109 of Surah Kahf, God says:

قُل لَّوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لِّكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَن تَنفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَدًا

Say, 'If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the words of my Lord are spent, though We brought another like it for replenishment.' (18:109)

In other words, even if you enjoyed the riches of this world that were equal to the vastness of the sea, it would still not suffice you. This is because you are an eternal being while riches (even if they amounted to the ocean) are things that are fleeting and momentary. If an eternal being were to rely on a fleeting one, he has no choice but to traverse the rest of the journey empty-handed [for his path is eternal while his provision is fleeting]. The phrase "though We brought another like it for replenishment" (18:109) does not simply mean that were another sea to be supplemented to the previous one, the words of God would still not end. Rather, it refers to the whole "species" of seas; in other words, if seas on end were to be brought to aid the first sea, all of them will be depleted but the grace of God and the divine words will still remain.

In the same way, God says the following in another part of the Qur'ān:

وَلَوْ أَنَّمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِن شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَامٌ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ مِن بَعْدِهِ
سَبْعَةُ أَبْحُرٍ مَّا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّـهِ

If all the trees on the earth were pens, and the sea replenished with seven more seas [were ink], the words of Allah would not be spent ...
(31:27)

Here the word "seven" denotes an immense quantity.

Therefore, if it has been proven that man is an eternal being and an eternal being cannot be satiated with even an "ocean of wealth", then man should not attach himself to anything that is not "with God".

Ignorance and Unawareness are two Factors that Cause Distance from Nobility

When Satan seeks to deceive us, he either afflicts us with compounded ignorance (*jahl murakkab*) or unawareness (*ghaflah*). In other words, either he will misguide us through the means of incorrect belief or he will make us inattentive [of God] by causing us to sin. In the latter case, the inattentive man may actually believe in and have knowledge of the Day of Judgement but not be attentive to it [at the time of sinning]. In so far

as he ends up sinning, he is no different from the ignorant man. God mentions unawareness and compounded ignorance in two separate places in the Qur'ān.

With regard to those afflicted with compounded ignorance, God says in verses 128-129 of Surah Shu'arā':

أَتَبْنُونَ بِكُلِّ رِيعٍ آيَةً تَعْبَثُونَ وَتَتَّخِذُونَ مَصَانِعَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَخْلُدُونَ

Do you futilely build a sign on every prominence? You set up structures as if you will be immortal (26:128-129)

Constructing such solid stone homes on the sides of mountains is an act that stems from an incorrect assumption—the assumption that one will remain in this world forever. This is similar to what God says in another place:

يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ

He supposes that his wealth will make him immortal. (104:3)

Such individuals are in essence ignorant, and believe that there will be no resurrection after death and that man only lives in the realm of nature.

Others, however, are inattentive and commit an error in application by going after that which is temporal. A good example of this is that which occurred in the story of Adam (*'a*). In verse 120 of Surah Ṭā Hā, God says the following:

فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ قَالَ يَا آدَمُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَىٰ شَجَرَةِ الْخُلْدِ وَمُلْكٍ لَّا يَبْلَىٰ

Then Satan tempted him. He said, 'O Adam! Shall I show you the tree of immortality, and an imperishable kingdom?' (20:120)

This is accomplished by means of trickery and insinuation. Satan whispered the following to Adam (*'a*): "Do you want me to guide you to a tree the fruits of which, if you eat, will allow you to stay in this garden forever?" The phrase: "an imperishable kingdom" means a kingdom that will never wean. It was this very insinuation that caused them to go and eat of the fruit of that tree. This is a form of being inattentive.

In other words, Satan whispers to the person who already knows deep down that one cannot live eternally in the natural world, but through this whispering, he becomes heedless of death and the hereafter. When one's attention is taken off from death, he begins to form an attachment to the natural world. When he attaches his heart to the natural world—i.e., the lowest and most demeaning realm—he can no longer become noble. This is because nobility is that which is *with God*.

The resting abode of eternal affairs is where we can find nobility, not the transient place of ephemerality. This is so because that which is changing or fading is not compatible with nobility. That which is in the natural world is temporary and fleeting; hence, attachment to it will never allow the immaterial spirit in man to become noble. The noble spirit of man is eternal while the goods of this world are transient, and that which is transient cannot make an eternal being noble.

We know that the innate disposition of man's eternal spirit is directed towards God. However, if he should happen to become pulled in the direction of nature, it is either out of compounded ignorance or unawareness. Now, if man can free himself from the evil of compounded ignorance and save himself from the danger of inattentiveness, then he will find his nobility once again. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'ān places much emphasis on both wisdom and the remembrance of God. It strives to educate man so that he may be safe from the dangers of compounded ignorance and also reminds man [of those things that he already knows] so that he may be safe from the dangers of inattentiveness.

Stated differently, that which causes man to "cling to the earth" (*ikhlād ila al-arḍ*) is compounded ignorance and unawareness:

أَخْلَدَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ

But he clung to the earth and followed his [base] desires. (7:176)

Compound ignorance occurs when the beliefs or thoughts of someone deviate causing him to "cling to the earth." Inattentiveness occurs when one has faith in God and the Resurrection

but becomes heedless of these things, and this heedlessness causes him to also "cling to the earth."

The fact that the Qur'ān stresses more than anything else knowledge and understanding, on the one hand, and remembrance and protecting oneself from heedlessness, on the other, is in order to make human beings aware of the road to nobility, to traverse it, and to realize that there is no nobility in the natural world. A materialistic man can never be noble. It is for this reason that when God recounts the story of those people who were afflicted with ignorance and unawareness, He says that they were disgraced, not that they were noble.

The Punishment of those Afflicted with Ignorance and Unawareness

In verse 69 of Surah Furqān, God says the following:

يُضَاعَفْ لَهُ الْعَذَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَيَخْلُدْ فِيهِ مُهَانًا

The punishment being doubled for him on the Day of Resurrection. In it he will abide in humiliation forever. (25:69)

For such an individual, his punishment will double in the Hereafter and he will be eternally disgraced by that punishment. In other words, instead of becoming noble, he will have transformed into a vile and base being. If man does not acquire his nobility by traversing the spiritual path then there is no other factor that will give him this nobility. As a result he will be afflicted with eternal disgrace.

The reason for this is as follows: The spirit of man is an eternal entity and hence demands its own eternal food. This eternal food—which is composed of the habituated dispositions of the soul—is either faith or disbelief. Now, that which is either rewarded or punished is his eternal soul [and not his body] based on the dispositions of his soul [hence, the reward or punishment will also be eternal just as the soul is].

The Cause of one's Residing Eternally in Hell

The reason that a man may burn in hell eternally is not because he may have sinned for fifty years for instance. Rather, it is because those fifty years created a disposition in his soul—the

disposition of disbelief (God forbid)—and that disposition is an eternal affair. If a deviated or repugnant set of beliefs finds its way into a man's soul, then it too will be immaterial and eternal just like the soul. God says that a man's punishment fits his crime.

جَزَاءً وِفَاقًا

A fitting requital. (78:26)

In other words, because you have acquired a disposition of the soul which is eternal, you will be afflicted with an eternal punishment. It is not true that you are burning eternally because of the fifty years of sin that you performed. Those fifty years are related to the body of the actions that you did. But the spirit of the crime, the intentions by which you performed your deeds, and the dispositions that you acquired by means of repeatedly engaging in those acts [are all immaterial and therefore] "years" and "months" do not apply to them. Time does not apply to knowledge or awareness. Only acts can be measured in terms of months and years.

Since man has an immaterial spirit and since his beliefs, ethical qualities, and the properties of his soul are all of an immaterial order (as is truly the case), time will not be applicable to them for only external acts are bound by time. There is a certain tradition that explains the reason as to why disbelievers will remain eternally in hell and it is indeed one of the gems of Islamic knowledge. It was asked from the Imam as to why the person who sinned for a specific period of time will be burned eternally. The Imam replied that it is because of his intention—i.e., his intention is such that if he were to remain eternally in this world he would continue sinning.[i]

Now one must not conclude from this tradition that if a man intends to sin forever, he will be punished forever (even though he does not actually perform the sin itself). For man's intention to sin is not capable of taking him to hell, let alone causing him to stay there forever.[ii] Rather this tradition seeks to state that

[i] "Kitāb al-īmān wa al-kufr," "Bāb al-niyyah," no. 5., *Uṣūl al-kāfi*.
[ii] This is one of the beautiful principles within Islam which emphasizes God's Mercy over His Justice. The principle is that when man intends to do good, he is rewarded for his sheer intention, even if he does not carry out the act itself;

people will be punished to the extent that they have acquired the disposition to sin when they reach a stage where God says regarding them:

وَسَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

It is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith. (36:10)

At other times, they themselves would explicitly say to their prophets:

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْنَا أَوَعَظْتَ أَمْ لَمْ تَكُن مِّنَ الْوَاعِظِينَ

'It is the same to us whether you advise us or not.' (26:136)

This disposition has become a part and parcel of their souls and cannot be eliminated.

One of the biggest sins is when man's set of beliefs is tainted with disbelief. It is precisely because of this interminable sin, and not their bodily acts, that the disbelievers and hypocrites will burn in the fire forever. The bodily acts are vices that can bring about injury to the body, and do not pertain to the heart. These outward sins cannot bring about eternal damnation; rather, it is disbelief and hypocrisy that will lead to endless suffering.

This explains why sinful Muslims [so long as their beliefs are correct] will not be punished in hell forever. In contrast, however, the deniers *will* be eternally punished in hell because disbelief is a perpetually lethal disposition. Hence, God says the following in Surah Furqān:

وَيَخْلُدْ فِيهِ مُهَانًا

In it he will abide in humiliation forever. (25:69)

He will always be afflicted with shame and dishonour.

The Reward of the Noble Ones

In opposition to those afflicted with shame there are certain individuals with regard to whom God has said:

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however, when a man intends to do evil then so long as he does not engage in it, he is not punished for this intention. [Ed.]

أُولَـٰئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُّكْرَمُونَ

They will be in gardens, held in honour. (70:35)

In other words, they will eternally be in the presence of nobility. The disbelievers and the hypocrites will be disgraced forever, but nobility will remain for the believers forever. This is because the believers, while in this world, strove to familiarize their souls with that which was eternal and everlasting. Moreover, man will always remain with the dispositions and qualities of his soul. It is the body that undergoes various states and will be returned in the Hereafter to its primary condition—a condition that is compatible with the dimensions of that world. As for the soul, it will not undergo any difference [and will remain in the same state that it left the world].

In summary we can say that if God has invited man to nobility, He has not forced him to bear more that he can shoulder for the innate disposition of human nature is towards nobility. Of course, this is a matter altogether different from man's knowledge, power, will, and choice, for in these matters, man is equally situated between faith and disbelief (though he may internally be drawn towards righteousness).

The Remembrance of Man's Source and End: A Factor in the Blossoming of His Innate Disposition (Fiṭrah)

The one thing that does not allow this inner pull to blossom is the soul's attachment to the material world, and as discussed previously, this attachment is caused by compounded ignorance or is the result of inattentiveness. The noble Qur'ān insists on first teaching man and then constantly reminding him. The most beneficial command of the Qur'ān is for him to constantly remember death—whether it be at the time of going to sleep or waking up. In fact, whenever any unpleasant event occurs he should say:

إِنَّا لِلَّـهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

... Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we indeed return. (2:156)

Even though most people consider only death to be a bitter event and recite the abovementioned verse when death is mentioned, the true monotheist will say it in response to any unpleasant thing that happens.

To explain, in the natural world, man is constantly in the state of change and mutation. For example, at one time there is the emergence of belief in him along with the advent of disbelief, then belief, then disbelief, and so on and so forth.[i] Until the last moment of his life, he is obliged to be watchful of his faith and to cleanse himself [from the stain of disbelief]. But if his very dispositions become tainted with disbelief, the opportunity to repent will not be granted to him. It was for this reason that the nation of Shu'ayb told him not to waste his time and explicitly stated "It is the same to us whether you advise us or not" (26: 136). God, Himself, affirms the obstinacy of certain stubborn disbelievers when He says: "It is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them..." (36:10). Of course, such people are still required to seek repentance but their own fate will not let them.

In the world of motion [i.e., the material realm], there is room for change and transformation, but when man departs from this ever-changing realm, his actions that he performed in the world will be severed [in terms of having an impact on his soul]: "When man dies, his actions will be severed except for three ..."[ii] The exception is not to say that new acts will be issued from him [with their own consequences]; rather, he will continue to see the effects of his own actions.

If the Qur'ān continually insists that man must remember death, it is to prevent the curtain of unawareness (*ghaflah*) from being hung over man's eyes. In the life of the holy Prophet, it has been related that once he was sitting in a room wherein the

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[i] A reference to the Qur'ānic verse: "As for those who believe and then disbelieve, then believe [again] and then disbelieve and then increase in disbelief, Allah shall never forgive them, nor shall He guide them to any way" (4:137). This illustrates the fact that man should never feel "safe" after having attained faith since in so far as he continues to live in the world of nature—which is a world of change and mutation—the possibility of his faith transforming into disbelief will also remain. [Ed.]

[ii] The full *ḥadīth*: "When a man dies, his actions will be severed from him except for three: (1) knowledge [left by him] that will be of benefit [to people], (2) charity [left by him] that will continue to flow for him, (3) a righteous son [left by him] who prays for him." *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 2, p. 23.

candle flame blew out. At this he said: "Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we indeed return" (2:156). Of course the utterance of this statement does not imply that the holy Prophet was concerned with or saddened by the lights being blown out, since even if the entire universe was taken away from him, he would not be troubled in the least. By way of example, we can mention the following: The battle of Badr was the first battle between faith and disbelief and was not a fair fight to say the least. Moreover, the army of Islam was not militarily trained for war but the armies of disbelievers were armed and prepared. Despite this situation, the only person that was not agitated or concerned in the least was the holy Prophet. He was found busy remembering Allah from morning to night under a tree. It was as if there was to be no war the next day by the name of Badr. Yet this same prophet, who has such a lofty outlook, recites the Islamic death formula when the candle-lights of his home are blown out!

The reason for the recitation of this formula [at such a seemingly inconsequential moment] is to make us understand that whenever something bad happens and something is taken away from us, we should understand that it belonged to God in the first place; it is He who gave it to us and it is He who then took it back. This conduct [pertaining to the Prophet] is a lesson for his nation. It was because of this that Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) said, "Remember the destroyer of pleasures"—i.e., remember death constantly. Just as knowledge prevents the vice of compounded ignorance, so too does remembrance—which comes after knowledge—prevent the vice of inattentiveness.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

Session Seven

Nobility is Obtained through Suffering and Aversion

Our discussion was about the nobility of man in the noble Qur'ān. Nobility is an attribute of the soul and all the attributes of the soul depend upon knowledge and repeated action [based on that knowledge].

If man does not know *the way* to obtain a [spiritual] characteristic then he will not be able to attain it. Or if he knows the way but does not repeatedly traverse it, then again he will not achieve the disposition that relates to that particular characteristic of the soul. Now since nobility is a characteristic of the soul, the affairs that are instrumental in its coming about should be known; once this is determined, the practical way of attaining it should be carried out in a repeated fashion.

People's souls are not identical to one another—some of them incline to noble characteristics more so than others. For such individuals, acquiring certain traits of the soul may be a bit easier. Nonetheless, all human beings are equal with regard to the fact that they must know the path that leads to those traits and must traverse it with at least some difficulty and effort.

One of the sayings of Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) is the following:

اَلْمَكَارِمُ بِالْمَكَارِهِ

Noble traits are obtained through hardships.[1]

The noble traits of the soul can only be acquired by [enduring] suffering and aversion. They cannot be obtained with comfort and ease. Hence, everyone must acquire noble qualities through their efforts and by bearing great inconveniences. Of course, these efforts and inconveniences may be greater for some and less for others.

The Goal of the Prophets is the Nobility of Man

The true goal of all the prophets in general and the Seal of the Prophets in particular—may countless blessings and praise

[1] *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, v. 1, p. 19, no. 43.

be on all of them—was to encourage people to instil noble ethical traits in themselves. In other words, all of the prophets have come so as to take people's souls to the lofty station of nobility, to ennoble them, and to distance them from baseness.

The holy Prophet (ṣ) has said, "I have been delegated [as a prophet] to perfect noble ethical traits."[1] So just as the holy Prophet (ṣ) was raised to complete the divine rules and laws, he was also raised to perfect man's noble ethical traits. The previous prophets (ʿa) taught people the path by which one can obtain noble ethical qualities, while the Seal of the Prophets (ṣ) brought with him a better and loftier path—the final of them all—in order to complete the paths of the previous prophets. Because God identifies the noble Qurʾān as a guardian over the other heavenly books, it is only inevitable that the spiritual curriculum of the Qurʾān should also be a completion to that which the previous prophets brought. To be a guardian over something means to hold command or to have authority over it. Therefore, all of the prophets have come in order to ennoble the souls of human beings while the blessed being of the Seal of the Prophets—may countless blessings and praise be on all of them—has come in order to perfect the noble qualities of the soul.

Man considers some things to be spiritual perfections but he does not know the way by which he can obtain these qualities. It is because of this that he often mistakenly pursues lowliness instead of nobility. In the previous discussion, we mentioned that man has an immaterial and eternal spirit. It is not befitting for an immaterial and eternal spirit to trust in things of a temporal nature. This is because that which is temporal will eventually be spent and depleted while man is still half-way on his [spiritual] journey. Verse 96 of Surah Naḥl was previously mentioned and used as evidence in this regard:

مَا عِندَكُمْ يَنفَدُ ۖ وَمَا عِندَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ

That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allah shall last ... (16:96)

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 16, p. 210.

Nobility is Exclusive to the Noble God

What we wish to say now is the following: According to the noble Qur'ān, not only is that which is with people bound to terminate and that which is with Allah destined to continue, but also that which is with others actually belongs to God. In other words, no one should surmise that others also have a share (no matter how limited) in the perfections and noble traits; further, no one should imagine that we can hope to gain some relative transient nobility by means of things that are with other people. Such an assumption is false and such a hope is a charade. This is because anything that is with others also, in effect, belongs to God. Therefore, if someone does not take steps in God's path, not only will he be deprived of eternal nobility, he will also not be able to obtain even a relative transient form of it. This is because everything in the realm of existence that is a source of nobility or any other ethical perfection is, in reality, the property of God.

Honour, Power, and Ownership are Exclusive to God

God has distinguished certain people as mighty and honourable (*ʿazīz*) such as the holy Prophet (ṣ), the believers, etc. Others, He has identified as being strong and powerful. For example, He says:

خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُم بِقُوَّةٍ

... Hold on with power to what We have given you ... (2:63)

With regards to the disbelievers, he advises the believers: Use every power you can to confront the infidels. Prepare yourself with powerful means to the best of your ability in order to subdue them:

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُم مَّا اسْتَطَعْتُم مِّن قُوَّةٍ

Prepare against them whatever you can of [military] power ... (8:60)

He says the following to John, the Martyr:

يَا يَحْيَىٰ خُذِ الْكِتَابَ بِقُوَّةٍ

O John, Hold on with power to the Book! (19:12)

In other verses, however, He has restricted honour and might to Himself. He says that other than God, not a single being is mighty—if they can be called 'mighty', it is only because of God's might manifested in them. He also confines power and strength to Himself as well, and so if there are people that are so-called 'powerful', it is only a mark of God's power that has been manifested in their beings.

Therefore, on the one hand, everything that is possessed by individuals is transient while everything that is with God is interminable as is clear from the verse:

مَا عِندَكُمْ يَنفَدُ ۖ وَمَا عِندَ اللَّـهِ بَاقٍ

That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allah shall last ... (16:96)

On the other hand, everything that is in the possession of others also belongs to God. Hence, if anyone wants to reach those limited and temporal perfections, he must also take steps on the path of God.

It is because of this that the believer strives to do everything for God's sake. If he performs some deed in order to draw the attention of some person or personality towards himself, not only will he not reach everlasting nobility but he will not even reach a limited form of it.

Verse 139 of the blessed Surah Nisā' is an example of where God limits might and honour (*ʿizzah*) to Himself:

الَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِن دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۚ
أَيَبْتَغُونَ عِندَهُمُ الْعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّـهِ جَمِيعًا

Those who take the faithless for allies instead of the faithful. Do they seek honour with them? [If so,] indeed all honour belongs to Allah. (4:139)

Verse 165 of the sacred Surah Baqarah in an example of where God limits power (*quwwah*) to Himself:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللَّـهِ أَندَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ
اللَّـهِ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِّلَّـهِ ۗ وَلَوْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ

ظَلَمُوا إِذْ يَرَوْنَ الْعَذَابَ أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّـهِ جَمِيعًا وَأَنَّ اللَّـهَ شَدِيدُ الْعَذَابِ

Among the people are those who set up compeers besides Allah, loving them as if loving Allah—but the faithful have a more ardent love for Allah—though the wrongdoers will see, when they sight the punishment, that power, altogether, belongs to Allah, and that Allah is severe in punishment. (2:165)

On that fateful Day, the polytheists will understand that all power belongs to God. This does not mean that all power will be owned by God [only] on the day of Resurrection. In other words, the Resurrection is not a time in which the absolute power of God will "come into existence"; rather it is a time in which the absolute power of God will become apparent [to mankind].

Stated differently, absolute power belongs to God alone at all times and, in fact, the true monotheist perceives this reality even at this moment. It is at the Resurrection that this reality will become evident for others as well and they will realize what they are too blind to see today:

أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّـهِ جَمِيعًا

... power, altogether, belongs to Allah ... (2:165)

The matter of ownership (*mulk*) is also the same. If, on the Day of Resurrection, ownership and the kingdom belong to God, it does not connote that today people also own certain things and tomorrow those things will be owned by God. Rather, the true owner—whether it be today or tomorrow—is God and God alone. For the true believers, this absolute ownership is evident even today. For the polytheists, it will only become clear tomorrow that absolute ownership is only for God. Therefore, if someone attempts to obtain power and strength by means of doing some action, he should know that all power exclusively belongs to God. He should only work in order to obtain the good-pleasure of God.

With regards to might and honour, as was previously mentioned, an analogous expression has been used. In verse 65 of the blessed Surah Yunus, God says:

وَلَا يَحْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ ۘ إِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّـهِ جَمِيعًا ۚ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

Do not grieve at their remarks; indeed all might belongs to Allah; He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing. (10:65)

However, in verse 8 of Surah Munāfiqūn, He says:

وَلِلَّـهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَـٰكِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

... Yet all might belongs to Allah and His Apostle, and the faithful, but the hypocrites do not know. (63:8)

The meaning of this verse is not that God, His prophet, and the believers are all [equally] mighty. Rather, it means that if the Prophet and the believers are mighty, they are the manifestations of the might of God, the Mighty. They are the loci of manifestation (*maẓāhir*)[5] of this sacred name.

Therefore, all honour and might belong to God. All power belongs to God. Absolute ownership and authority belong to God. If someone wants to reach the station of might or power, he must not do anything for the satisfaction of anyone other than God. This is because if he wants to reach perfection then he should realize that all perfection belongs to God. It is not true that other beings also possess perfections but those perfections are limited while the perfections of God are unlimited. This is an incorrect analysis of the verse: "What is with you will perish while what is with God will remain" (16:96). Rather, everything that others have also belongs to God. An ignoble person whose view is limited only sees things either as transient or "borrowed" [from God].[6] But, because the vision of the noble man is vast, neither does he see the transient nor does he go after that which is so-called "borrowed"; rather, he sees only the permanent and seeks only the "original". It is for this reason that the noble man only takes step forward in the path of obtaining the good pleasure of God.

The Outlook of the Noble Ones

When God explicates the qualities of the noble ones in the Qur'ān, He states that if these people give food as charity to others, they say:

إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّـهِ

We feed you only for the sake [lit. Face] of Allah ... (76:9)

To do something "for the Face of Allah" (*li wajh Allah*) is to do it "for the manifestation of that which is free from waning and perishing." This is because every being is in the process of perishing except the Face of God (*wajh Allah*), according to the verse:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

... Everything is to perish except His Face ... (28:88)

Therefore if someone works for the Face of God—i.e., if his intention, goal, and will is focused on the Face of God—then this wayfarer will undeniably reach his destination. The reason for this is because God has "authorized" such an intention, and His authorization implies that both the wayfarer's intention and attention to it will lead him to traversing the Path. Moreover, he will become the locus of the manifestation of the Face of God (*maẓhar wajh Allah*)—which is the very goal of the wayfarers of monotheism—thereby becoming eternal and free from perishing. To explain, whoever arrives at the destination has the same verdict as the destination itself; hence, [since his destination—which is the Face of God—is preserved from perishing] he will be eternal and free from perishing. It is for this reason that the Perfect Man is immortal.

Sometimes God depicts the Face of God as such:

وَلِلَّـهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ ۚ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّـهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّـهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

To Allah belong the east and the west: so whichever way you turn, there is the Face of Allah! Allah is indeed all-bounteous, all-knowing. (2:115)

Any individual in any circumstance can labour for the Face of God. It is not limited to a specific person or a special kind of action. It is not possible for a man to be in a certain corner of the world and say, "it is not in my power to work for the Face of God." Rather, in whatever place, time, and conditions he may find himself in and whatever work he may wish to do, it is possible for him to focus on the Face of God. This is because the Face of God is constant, everlasting, and apparent in all places.

If someone labours for the Face of God, he will in turn become the locus of the manifestation of this attribute. Thus he will also become manifest in all places [like the Face of God] and he will shower his blessings on everything. God alludes to such people in the Qur'ān. For example, He quotes Jesus (*'a*) as saying:

وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُ

He has made me blessed, wherever I may be ... (19:31)

In other words, "God has made me a means to cascade His blessings on others wherever I am." Not only is Jesus a source of blessings in this world but when he (and other perfect souls like him) enter the imaginal realm (*barzakh*) they become a source of blessings for those who dwell in that realm. When they enter the Resurrection, they become a source of blessings for those in the Resurrection. When they cross the threshold of Paradise, they become a source of nobility and blessings for the inhabitants of Paradise. This is because the actions of these types of Perfect Men are for the Face of God:

فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّـهِ

... Wherever you look there is the Face of God ... (2:115)

Such thoughts and actions are an example of nobility.

The Manner of Worship of the Noble Ones

If we become noble human beings it is inevitable that our worship will be blended with the colour of nobility. We will worship in a noble way. We will not worship for profit or to test God [i.e., as to whether He will reward us or not]. The person

who worships out of fear of hellfire or out of desiring "the gardens beneath which rivers flow"[7] is not noble. In fact, some great personalities have considered nobility (*karāmah*) to be superior to freedom (*hurriyyah*).[8] In his Qur'ānic lexicon *Mufradāt*, the lexicographer Rāghib relates from some prominent individuals that nobility is loftier than freedom because insignificant good-deeds or works of a mediocre nature can be accomplished with freedom, but in order to perform outstanding deeds, one must implement them with nobility.

The noble man does not seek anything other than God. It is possible for a person to be a free-thinker. He may not fear anything or hope to gain anything that is transient but at the same time, he may not partake of the higher levels of nobility. The higher levels of nobility dictate that we only work for the Face of God. The worship that has been described as an attribute of the Ahl al-Bayt (*ʿa*) in Surah Insān is a guide for those people who are traversing the path of nobility:

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا إِنَّمَا
نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّـهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكُورًا

They give food, for the love of Him, to the needy, the orphan and the prisoner, [saying,] 'We feed you only for the sake [lit. Face] of Allah. We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks. (76:8-9)

The true motive of the noble person is to ennoble others; it is not to feed them. He does not simply want to satisfy their stomachs; he wants to fill their being with nobility. Because of this, if he feeds or clothes another person, he does it along with ennobling them. How many a person today, engrossed in his own thoughts, simply satiates a hungry man without being concerned about the other aspects of his being. The noble person, however, not only satiates the hunger of the other person but also protects his honour and nobility. This is because all the works of a noble person are noble.

The noble one does not seek anything other than the Face of Truth. Not only does he contemplate over matters pertaining to the eternal (*baqā*) and the perishing (*fanā*) (which was discussed earlier), but he also contemplates over matters pertaining to

what is essential (*bi al-dhāt*) and what is accidental (*bi al-araḍ*) (which is the focus of the present discussion). God tells us not to seek other than the Truth since there is no honour or power there. If someone seeks honour or might then he should know that "Indeed all honour belongs to Allah" (4:139). And if he seeks power then he should know that "Power, altogether, belongs to Allah" (2:165).

No one should surmise that attaining this position is strictly limited to the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa). This is because the station of that Household is far loftier than that it could be summarized in simply feeding the orphans and the war-captives. The proof of this is that their servant Fiḍḍah was also present in this incident [and thus the verse also refers to her]. Any man who traverses the path of this Household will become like Salmān:

سَلْمَانُ مِنَّا أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ

Salmān is from us, the Ahl al-Bayt.[1]

And any woman who follows the path of this Household will become like Fiḍḍah who was present in this incident. Therefore, it is not possible to say that reaching this station is only achievable for that particular Household of the Prophet. In fact, the stations that are particular to this Household cannot be easily grasped by the general populous.

For every station that they [i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt] have encouraged us to obtain, two facts can be deduced: (1) in terms of knowledge, what they have told us can be comprehended; and (2) in terms of materialization in this world, that particular station can be obtained through constant repetition.

It is a stupendous action to keep a recommended fast or a fast for which one has taken an oath and to remain hungry in the burning climate of the Hijaz, then to borrow some wheat or barley from somewhere [since one does not have adequate financial means at the time], then to have it ground into flour, and then after all this to suffice oneself with only water for a few nights [instead of a proper meal when it is time to break one's fast] in order to give that meal to a poor man, an orphan, and a

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 10, p. 123.

captive of war—particularly if that captive happens to be a disbelieving man[i]—so that none of them remain hungry. Such a sacrifice is undoubtedly nobility itself and it is not limited to the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt. This is because the apprentice of Ahl al-Bayt—i.e., the maid Fiḍḍah—had a part to play in this event. After all, it was she who actually gave each poor person the piece of bread. Therefore, this unselfishness and this kindness is a path which both man and woman can travel and by thus traveling it they can reach nobility and magnanimity. In short, this path is a traversable path.

If someone reaches a station where he only works for the Face of God, then his efforts are not to save himself from the hellfire or to enter Paradise. The person who bears this ordeal is not thinking about his daily bread or the sweets of tomorrow; all he can think about is the beatific encounter with the Divine (*liqā' Allah*). If someone has reached the boundaries of nobility, his worship takes on a whole new colour—it becomes spiritually noble. It is for this reason that Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) said, "Noble traits are only obtained through hardships."[ii] In other words, so long as a man does not bear unpleasant and difficult ordeals, he will not reach nobility.

Nobility in the Words of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa)

We will now narrate some traditions about nobility that have been related in the book *Ghurar wa durar* from Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) in order to highlight the fact that the soul of a person—whether they be male or female, fallible or infallible—can reach a station where he or she will not think about anything other than the beatific encounter.

One of these traditions is the following:

الكَرَمُ إيثارُ العِرْضِ عَلَى المَالِ

Nobility is to prefer honour over wealth.[iii]

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[i] Of course, it is not completely impossible for a captive of war to have become a Muslim in Madinah. Nonetheless, when one examines the facts of the situation, it becomes quite plausible that this captive was a non-believer: (1) this event took place in Madinah; (2) the prisoners of war normally came from polytheistic territories; and (3) there was no Muslim taken captive in Madinah.

[ii] *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, v. 1, p. 19, no. 43.

[iii] *Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 349, no. 1323.

The noble man protects his honour with his wealth but the vile man guards his wealth with his honour. This matter is an [ethical] standard whereby we can understand whether we are noble or vile and evaluate ourselves through it. Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) is telling us that if we protect our honour by our wealth then this is nobility, but if we protect our wealth with our honour then this is ignobleness.

In another tradition, he says:

الكَريمُ مَنْ سَبَقَ نَوالُهُ سُؤالَهُ

The noble person is the one whose act of giving precedes the act of his being asked.[i]

If someone gives before he is asked to do so, he is a noble person.

Another tradition is as follows:

الكَرَمُ نَتيجَةُ عُلُوِّ الهِمَّةِ

Nobility is the result of sublime ambition.[ii]

When a person's ambition is high, he becomes magnanimous.

One of the highlights of the words of the sixth Imam is the following: "The body of the strong-willed shall never become weak."[iii] In other words, if one's willpower becomes strong, one's body will not experience any weakness. When we notice that our bodies do not act according to what we desire, it is because our will is weak. If the will was strong, the body would never experience any weakness. It would not force its weakness upon the will of that person. This may shed light on the next tradition from Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa):

النَّفْسُ الكَريمَةُ لاَ تُؤَثِّرُ فيهِ النَّكَباتُ

Calamities do not affect the noble soul.[iv]

The noble soul will not abscond when faced with unbecoming affairs. All of the divine scholars bore difficulties so that they could reach high stations of knowledge. It is not the case

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[i] *Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 365, no. 1389.
[ii] *Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 383, no. 1477.
[iii] *Man lā yahduruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 400, no. 5859.
[iv] *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, v. 2, p. 1, no. 1555.

that the world is free of calamities and that those who reached high stations did so without any difficulty. But the Imam says that difficulties do not have an effect on the soul of a magnanimous and noble spirit.

In another tradition, he says:

الكَريمُ مَنْ تَجَنَّبَ المَحارِمَ وَ تَنَزَّهَ عَنِ العُيُوبِ

The noble person will steer clear (*tajannaba*) from that which has been prohibited [by God] and keep himself free from defects [of the soul].[i]

The noble person is one who stays away from forbidden things. The verb '*tajannaba*' means to stand aside detached. When man travels alongside sin, he becomes tarnished by it. But when he stands opposed to sin—in other words, if he separates his position from that of sin—this act is called '*ijtināb*'. To stay away from sin implies that sin takes root on one side while the man stands on the other. Now, since the noble man keeps away from all sin and is not on the same side as sin, there is absolutely no way he will be contaminated by it. As for the second part of the tradition, it means that he will keep himself pure from all defects—neither does he spread the faults of others, nor does he seek faults in others, nor does he bring about faults in himself.

Another tradition is as follows:

الكَريمُ يَزْدَجِرُ عَمَّا يَفْتَخِرُ بِهِ اللَّئِيمُ

The noble person is kept away from that which the base person prides himself with.[ii]

A man of nobility is disgusted by everything that a base man prides himself on. A base person becomes happy and prides himself when he walks ahead of others, when others stand up out of respect for him, and when he sits at the head of a gathering. In fact, he becomes this way at any apparent instance of respect that may be in vogue at the time (all of which are ways by which God tests our sincerity towards Him). These are all conventions and vain fancies. The one with a noble spirit, however, does not feel at ease in the face of these fancies.

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[i] *Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 4, no. 1565.
[ii] *Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 44, no. 177.

In another tradition, the Imam says:

الكَريمُ عِنْدَ الله مَحْبُورٌ مثابٌ وَ عِنْدَ النَّاسِ مَحْبوبٌ مُهابٌ

The noble person is happy with God and has his refuge (*mathāb*) with Him; he is loved by the people and is the object of their reverence.[i]

The noble man is joyful when he is "with God" and benefits from divine reward. The word "*thawāb*" is derived from the root "*thawb*" [lit. garment]. The noble man weaves a robe of nobility for himself and at the Resurrection he puts it on. It is in this world that he weaves it and it is on the Day of Resurrection that he will don it. This concept has also been related about the unbelievers and the hypocrites in so far as they will have frightening clothes [that they prepared themselves]. The "warp and woof" of the attire that they stitch will be made from blades and thorns.

So the garment that man will don on that day is either the silk of Paradise[9] woven from the tenderness of his actions in this world or it is the sharp blades and thorns of hell stitched from the brutality and hardness of his heart in this world. It is in this world that man weaves his [spiritual] clothes and it is in the next world that he must wear them. If people find their clothes to be soft then it is because they were "merciful amongst themselves" (48:29), but if they find them to be coarse, it is because of their discord, trickery, enmity, and incivility towards the Muslims.

As for the second part of the tradition, it means that the hearts of other people are inclined to a noble person—i.e., when they see him, they are filled with admiration and wonder. Once, a person asked the holy Prophet (ṣ): "What path can I travel that will make both God and the people love me?" He replied: "Desire that which is with God and God will love you; and abstain from that which is with the people, and they will love you."[ii] This is similar to the tradition we have mentioned where the Imam says that the noble person is not only elated and rewarded with God, but is also the focus of the people's love, admiration, and reverence.

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[i] *Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 151, no. 2146.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 75, p. 107-108.

Another tradition is as follows:

الكريمُ مَنْ صانَ عِرْضَهُ بِمالِهِ وَ اللَّئيمُ مَنْ صانَ مالَهُ بِعِرْضِهِ

The noble person protects his honour with his wealth while the base one protects his wealth with his honour.[i]

The noble one is the person who protects his honour with his wealth. If at some point his reputation is in danger, he will give of his wealth to protect his honour. If taking some money from someone will lead to a decrease in his repute then he will not take that money. By giving of his wealth or by not taking someone else's wealth, he protects his reputation. But the lowly person protects his wealth with his honour and reputation. If he has capital he will not give it away even though this may be to the detriment of his reputation. If he does not have any capital then he will ask another for it though it may lead to his dishonour.

In another place the Imam says that if nobility does not become the basis of existence of a person then (whether he likes it or not) baseness will find its way into his soul. If someone does not make himself noble, in the end he will become debased:

مَنْ لَمْ تُقَوِّمْهُ الكِرامَةُ قَوَّمَتْهُ الإهانَةُ

If nobility does not become the basis for someone, then dishonour will.[ii]

When nobility is not what keeps his soul upright, then lowliness will become the foundation of his existence.

Elsewhere, the Imam (ᶜa) says:

مَنْ كَرُمَتْ نَفْسُهُ، صَغُرَتِ الدُّنيا فى عَيْنِهِ

He whose soul becomes noble, the entire world will seem small in his eyes.[iii]

If someone comes to know himself well and understands that his soul is noble and grand, then the *entire* world will become insignificant in his eyes, let alone that which is with a mortal being. In a similar light, Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) says, "The Creator has

[i] *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, vol. 2, p. 153, no. 2159.
[ii] *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 289, no. 8201.
[iii] *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 451, no. 9130.

been magnified in their souls so that everything else appears insignificant in their eyes."[i] If God was great in one's heart, everything else would become small and inconsequential. Likewise, in the above-mentioned tradition, Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) says that if the soul becomes noble, it will consider the world as being of no consequence.

The reason as to why the memory of these great personalities remains forever is the fact that they submitted themselves to the everlasting Face of God. These ennobled people will always remain because they worked for the Face of God and since the Face of God is eternal, such individuals will also be eternal. Of course, this does not mean that the way that God is eternal and the way that these individuals are eternal is at par with one another; after all, that which is other than the Face of God will perish:

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

Everyone on it is ephemeral; yet lasting is the Face of your Lord, majestic and munificent. (55:26-27)

Hence, only the Face of God will remain. As for the divine scholars who will also remain,[ii] it is because their actions were always for the Face of God; hence, they became attached to the Eternal God.

A Synopsis of our Discussion

To summarize, if in Surah Munāfiqūn, God says, "Yet all honour belongs to Allah and His Apostle, and the faithful, but the hypocrites do not know" (63:8) and in Surah Yunus, He says, "Honour belongs solely to God" (10:65), it implies that if others are honourable, it is only because they have connected themselves with that Being who is essentially honourable. Similarly, if John (ᶜa) or others have been attributed with the quality of power, it is not because these individuals are powerful independently and alongside God; rather, it is because they have

[i] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 193.
[ii] A reference to saying 139 of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) in the *Nahj al-balāghah*: "The scholars will remain as long as time remains."

laboured for the Face of God. Since God is powerful in His essence, these people also become powerful, though not in their essence but through Him; hence, God says, "All power belongs solely to God" (2:165).

Becoming eternal is also of the same nature. It must not be said that scholars remain and God also remains [and they are at par with one another]; rather, it is only because the true scholars labour for the Face of God (which will remain), that we can say of them: "The scholars will remain as long as time remains."[i] Since the noble man works for the Face of God, he will remain forever.

Also, in the same way that the Face of God casts its shadow upon the world [meaning that it is above and beyond it], so too does the noble man cast his shadow upon the world [and therefore is not concerned with it]. Hence, we have the words of Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*): "He whose soul becomes noble, the entire world will seem small in his eyes."[ii]

The noble man never grieves about the world. Others become miserable when the world slips out of their hands and console themselves with poetry or prayer. They say, "we must bear this loss with patience." But the noble man never gets vexed; instead, he says, "we have not lost anything the absence of which may cause us pain." These two attitudes are diametrically opposed to one another.

If someone does not use worship and the ethical commandments to obtain the habit of nobility and magnanimity then he will always be vexed. He will always say, "We must be patient in the face of these hardships." But if he uses worship and the ethical commandments to gain the attribute of the soul—i.e., nobility—then even though he may face difficulties in the beginning of his path, after obtaining the disposition of nobility, he will never be pained when faced with difficulties. He will never grieve as to why the resources of the world are in the hands of another and not in his. Rather, the entire world will be small in his eyes and, inevitably, he will be secure from greed and other social and ethical maladies.

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[i] *Nahj al-balāgha*, saying 139.
[ii] *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, vol. 5, p. 451, no. 9130.

The reason that some people are afflicted with self-indulgence is that they consider their perfection to lie in this world. When they see that a particular perfection is in the hands of another, they are troubled. Sometimes, this greed manifests itself in scholarly issues where a man says, "Why have others been granted knowledge? Why have I not been given it?" and then tries to attain a high academic position because of it. But all of this is just envy which has become the "beauty" and "majesty" [the end-all and be-all] of his soul. As for the noble man, the thought never crosses his mind as to why such a conventional title is given to him and why a different one is given to someone else, or why others have attained wealth but why he has not. Such a person is always at ease and hence, he will become a model of emulation for others.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

Session Eight

God-wariness: the Core of Nobility

Our discussion regarding the nobility of man in the Qur'ān has given us the following two conclusions: The first is that God considers nobility to revolve around God-wariness (*taqwā*). To say that nobility revolves around God-wariness is to say that nobility will depend upon God-wariness in its existence and non-existence, in its emergence and continuation, in its strength and weakness, and in all other aspects. It is not possible that someone possesses a lofty station of nobility but be weak with regard to their degree of God-wariness. This is because it would entail that the extra portion of nobility is not supported by God-wariness. The second conclusion is that God has structured God-wariness on the basis of both knowledge and worship.

Knowledge and Righteous Action: the Basis of God-wariness

So nobility revolves around the axis of God-wariness, and God-wariness depends upon knowledge (*maʿrifah*) and righteous action (*ʿamal ṣāliḥ*). To explain, when God expounds upon the divine rules and regulations, He instructs us to carry out these commands in order to become God-wary:

لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

... so that you may become God-wary (2:183)

We can deduce from this that God-wariness follows from righteous actions. Now since action can never be performed without knowledge, God-wariness is tied to both knowledge and righteous action. Aside from this, the sixth Imam (ʿa) has also given us a command in this regards which we will relate shortly.

In verse 63 of the blessed Surah Baqarah as well as in verse 171 of Surah Aʿrāf, God says:

خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُم بِقُوَّةٍ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

... Hold on with power to what We have given you [of the scriptures], and remember that which is in it, so that you may be God-wary. (2:63/7:171)

Even though these verses are addressed to the Israelites, it is not restricted to them nor does the Torah have some quality that the Qur'ān might be lacking in [so that this command may only apply to the former and not the latter]. He says: You will not gain God-wariness until you firmly take hold of that which God has told you [to take a hold of] and constantly remind yourselves of its contents. Therefore, God-wariness depends upon firmly taking hold of the heavenly commandments.

A man once asked the sixth Imam (ᶜa) about the expression "with power" that is found in the Qur'ānic phrase mentioned above (i.e., "hold on with power to what We have given you") as to whether it referred to the power of the body or the power of the heart. In other words, does it mean that we should try to understand the divine scriptures well and that we strengthen the faith of our hearts in relation to it or does it mean that we firmly take hold of it with the limbs of our body?' The Imam said: "Both of them together."[i]

In other words, the imperative is to understand the divine sciences and the ethical and jurisprudential laws in a complete fashion. We should strive to support them either with intellectual demonstrations or with transmitted traditions and teach ourselves the valid arguments in defence of our core religious beliefs. Once we have a good grasp of this, we must believe it with the utmost dignity and firmness and defend this set of beliefs with power. Therefore, "holding on with power" is the amalgamation of perfect knowledge and perfect action. It is only then that God-wariness can be obtained. Once God-wariness is achieved, nobility will follow suit.

Therefore, nobility is dependent on God-wariness, God-wariness on "holding on with power", and "holding on with power" on perfect knowledge and complete action.

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[i] *Maḥāsin Barqī*, v. 1, p. 261, no. 319.

Knowledge: the Basis of Nobility, God-wariness, and Righteous Action

If God-wariness was described as the source and root of nobility, it must be stated that, in reality, it is an intermediary and not a primary source. This is because when we trace the roots of the matter, we will ultimately arrive at 'knowledge'. We will find that knowledge is the principle and root of all these matters. This is because knowledge is that which breathes life into righteous actions. Therefore, until man does not become knowledgeable and aware, neither will he go after righteous acts nor will he imbibe his deeds with sincerity.

When we analyse the verses of the Qur'ān, we find that the foremost source of man's nobility is correct knowledge (*ʿilm*) and righteous acts (*ʿamal ṣāliḥ*). In fact, this conclusion can be stated as a general principle. With regard to the specific instances [of this general principle] such as fasting or other things, God said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God-wary. (2:183)

The same analysis can be made for all specific instances in the sense that all these point to extensions or examples of God-wariness. Moreover, every particular example of God-wariness lays the grounds for a particular kind of nobility to arise and is itself the result of true knowledge and righteous acts. This is because God-wariness (as a quality of the soul) is of necessity preceded by [and depends upon] knowledge and righteous acts.

God has granted a lofty position to the noble ones because he has favoured the God-wary ones with a high position. In other words, since God-wariness is the basis of nobility [and since the God-wary ones have a high position], there will exist a high station for the noble ones as well. The distinction and superiority of such individuals will be apparent in this world for those who

have insight; as for those who don't have insight, this superiority will become apparent for them in the Hereafter.

In verse 212 of the blessed Surah Baqarah, God says:

زُيِّنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۘ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَن يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

Worldly life has been glamorized for the faithless, and they ridicule the faithful. But those who are God-wary shall be above them on the Day of Resurrection, and Allah provides for whomever He wishes without any reckoning. (2:212)

In other words, even though the worldly people used to ridicule the God-wary ones in this world, in the next world the God-wary will be in a higher position than them. This is because that world is where realities will become manifest. If realities were hidden in this world then on the Last Day they will be witnessed by all people.

The meaning of the passage "the God-wary shall be above them on the Day of Resurrection" (2:212) has been conveyed again in verse 20 of Surah Zumar where "lofty abodes" are described for the God-wary:

لَٰكِنِ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ لَهُمْ غُرَفٌ مِّن فَوْقِهَا غُرَفٌ مَّبْنِيَّةٌ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ ۖ لَا يُخْلِفُ اللَّهُ الْمِيعَادَ

But as for those who are wary of their Lord, for them there will be lofty abodes with [other] lofty abodes built above them, with streams running beneath them—a promise of Allah. Allah does not break His promise. (39:20)

Obstacles to Nobility

After analysing the basis of nobility and the essential conditions for acquiring it, it is befitting now to investigate the obstacles to nobility so that it becomes clear as to what sorts of

obstacles impede nobility. After all, we must not only understand the factors that bring about nobility but also those impediments which prevent it from emerging.

The pure Imams (ᶜa) have identified the things that can prevent nobility from emerging and that can thwart man from raising up the principle pillars of nobility (i.e. true knowledge and righteous deeds). Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) has said the following regarding the Imams (ᶜa) who are undoubtedly the true noble ones:

فيهم كَرائِمُ القُرآن

In them are the noble gems of the Qur'ān[1]

Even though all of the verses of the Qur'ān are noble, the loftiest verses of the Qur'ān pertain to the Imams. Undoubtedly, these great souls who have reached the high station of magnanimity and who have traversed this way can easily explain those things that prevent nobility from emerging.

The Deceptive Glitter and Glamour of this World

One of the greatest impediments that obstructs the wayfarer on his path towards nobility is the glitter and glamour of this world. To associate with any of the various dimensions and aspects of the world is a "bandit" that prevents man from reaching his nobility.

God relates the materialistic outlook in the blessed Surah Fajr and then renounces it:

فَأَمَّا الْإِنسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ كَلَّا

As for man, whenever his Lord tests him and grants him honour and blesses him, he says, 'My Lord has honoured me.' But when He tests him and tightens for him his provision, he says, 'My Lord has humiliated me.' No indeed (kalla)! ... (89:15-17)

[1] *Nahj al-balāgha*, sermon 154.

Many people possess this kind of world-view, but the Qur'ān says that such a world-view is wrong. The world *"kallā"* means "in no way is this true." God tests man, sometimes through wealth and sometimes through poverty. Imam ʿAlī has analysed this meaning to such an extent that no one can doubt its veracity after reading his analysis. So let us turn to some of his words in this regard.

Nobility in the words of the Commander of the Faithful

In Sermon 159 of the venerable *Nahj al-balāghah*, the Imam says:

وَ لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ- صلى الله عليه واله- مَا يَدُلُّكَ عَلَى مَسَاوِئِ الدُّنْيَا وَ عُيُوبِهَا إِذْ جَاعَ فِيهَا مَعَ خَاصَّتِهِ وَ زُوِيَتْ عَنْهُ زَخَارِفُهَا مَعَ عَظِيمِ زُلْفَتِهِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ نَاظِرٌ بِعَقْلِهِ أَ أَكْرَمَ اللَّهُ مُحَمَّداً بِذَلِكَ أَمْ أَهَانَهُ فَإِنْ قَالَ أَهَانَهُ فَقَدْ كَذَبَ وَ اللَّهِ الْعَظِيمِ وَ أَتَى بِالْإِفْكِ الْعَظِيمِ وَ إِنْ قَالَ أَكْرَمَهُ فَلْيَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَهَانَ غَيْرَهُ حَيْثُ بَسَطَ الدُّنْيَا لَهُ وَ زَوَاهَا عَنْ أَقْرَبِ النَّاسِ مِنْهُ فَتَأَسَّى مُتَأَسٍّ بِنَبِيِّهِ وَ اقْتَصَّ أَثَرَهُ وَ وَلَجَ مَوْلِجَهُ وَ إِلاَّ فَلاَ يَأْمَنُ الْهَلَكَةَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ جَعَلَ مُحَمَّداً- صلى الله عليه واله- عَلَماً لِلسَّاعَةِ وَ مُبَشِّراً بِالْجَنَّةِ وَ مُنْذِراً بِالْعُقُوبَةِ ...

... Certainly there was in the Prophet of Allah all that would apprise you of the evils of this world and its defects, namely that he remained hungry along with his chief companions, and despite his great nearness the allurements of the world remained remote from him. Now, one should see with one's intelligence whether Allah honoured Muḥammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his descendants) as a result of this or disgraced him. If he says that Allah disgraced him [i.e., the Prophet], by God, he lies a great lie and perpetrates a great untruth. If he says Allah honoured him, he should know that Allah dishonoured the others when He extended the [benefits of the] world for them but held it away from him [i.e., the Prophet] who was the nearest to Him of all men. Therefore, one should follow His Prophet, tread in his footsteps and enter through his entrance. Otherwise he will not be safe from ruin. Certainly,

> Allah made Muḥammad (the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his descendants) a sign for the Day of Judgement, a conveyor of tidings for Paradise, and a warner of retribution ...[1]

Let us go through this passage in some detail. The Imam says:

> Certainly there was in the Prophet of Allah all that would apprise you of the evils of this world and its defects, namely that he remained hungry along with his chief companions ...

So the holy Prophet (ṣ) used to remain hungry along with his closest companions.

> ... and the allurements of the world remained remote from him ...

The glitter of this world was isolated from them. In other words, the allurements of the world would be on one side while the Prophet (ṣ) established himself on the opposite side.

> ... despite his great nearness ...

Even though the Prophet had many high stations near God [and would have been granted sustenance had he so asked] yet he bore the pangs of hunger with the rest of his companions.

The Imam continues:

> ... Now, one should see (*yanẓur*) with one's intelligence (*bi aqlihi*) ...

A sensible person should see with his intellect (in other words he should give his opinion). The *naẓara/yanẓuru* [from the verb "to see" that is mentioned in the sermon] here does not refer to the eyes focussing towards a sensible object; it does not mean that one should look at something with one's eyes open. The meaning of this *naẓara* is the same as that *naẓara* which has been mentioned in the accepted tradition of ʿUmar ibn Ḥanẓalah from the sixth Imam who said: "[you must refer to someone] ... who gives his verdict (*naẓara*) regarding what is permissible and what is impermissible according to us" (in other words,

[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 159.

someone who is an authority and can give decrees). So Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) is telling us: You should become an authority on this issue, give your verdict, and decide as to the conclusion of this matter. The issue is:

> ... whether Allah honoured Muḥammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his descendants) as a result of this or disgraced him ...

How do you see the matter? Do you think that God disgraced the holy Prophet (ṣ) or honoured and ennobled him when he prevented him from worldly benefits? Only one of these two verdicts can be true in this situation.

> ... If he says that Allah disgraced him [i.e., the Prophet], by God, he lies a great lie and perpetrates a great untruth ...

If someone says that by preventing his Prophet from the benefits of the bounties of the world, God had disgraced him, by God, he has lied—in other words, the verdict itself is false (not that the person is a liar). To explain, sometimes, a man considers a speaker to be a liar and says that he has lied in this or that verdict [precisely because he is a liar]. At other times, however, he focuses on a specific opinion or verdict and says: "This particular opinion does not correspond to reality. It is a false manner of thinking (regardless of whether it is voiced or not)." It is in this latter manner that Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) says: If someone should think, God forbid, that by not giving His Prophet (ṣ) the wealth of the world, God had disgraced him, then: "by God, he lies a great lie and perpetrates a great untruth."

Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) refers to this lie as a great lie. Not all lies are the same. Some lies do the work of many years of lying. For example, if someone should lie for many years, to the extent that lying becomes second nature to him, then he will be a chronic liar. Sometimes, however, he may lie just once but because the lie is so great, he will still be considered a chronic liar. Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) says that the belief that God had disgraced His Prophet is a great lie. In other words, this belief is undoubtedly a false one.

> ... If he says Allah honoured him ...

If someone says that by not afflicting his Prophet (ṣ) with the filth of this world, He had honoured him:

> ... he should know that Allah dishonoured the others when He extended the (benefits of the) world for them ...

In other words, he should know that God has dishonoured the covetous ones. God has disgraced those people who have busied themselves with the wealth of this world. This is because man has the potential to become the travel companion of the angels; so if he busies himself with nothing but cattle, plants, and rocks, he has been disgraced. As for Prophet Solomon and people like him, it is not that they were "of this world"; it is true that the world was under their dominion but they lived like the common person and did not get entranced by the world.

> ... but held it away from him [i.e., the Prophet] who was the nearest to Him of all men ...

God distanced the world from that person who was the closest to Him and opened it up for others.

> Therefore, one should follow His Prophet, tread in his footsteps and enter through his entrance. Otherwise he will not be safe from ruin. Certainly, Allah made Muḥammad (the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his descendants) a sign for the Day of Judgement, a conveyor of tidings for Paradise, and a warner of retribution ...

Many parts of this sermon, from here till the end, are in concordance with the advice that the holy Prophet gave to Ibn Masʿūd and whose text has been related in *Makārim al-akhlāq* and also in *Biḥār al-anwār*.

In the last parts of Sermon 164 in which there is mention of the creation of the peacock, the following has been related:

قَوْمٌ لَمْ تَزَلِ الْكَرَامَةُ تَتَمَادَى بِهِمْ حَتَّى حَلُّوا دَارَ الْقَرَارِ وَ أَمِنُوا نُقْلَةَ الْأَسْفَارِ فَلَوْ شَغَلْتَ قَلْبَكَ أَيُّهَا الْمُسْتَمِعُ بِالْوُصُولِ إِلَى مَا يَهْجُمُ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ تِلْكَ الْمَنَاظِرِ الْمُونِقَةِ لَزَهَقَتْ نَفْسُكَ شَوْقاً إِلَيْهَا وَ لَتَحَمَّلْتَ مِنْ مَجْلِسِي هَذَا إِلَى مُجَاوَرَةِ أَهْلِ الْقُبُورِ اسْتِعْجَالاً بِهَا جَعَلَنَا اللَّهُ وَ إِيَّاكُمْ مِمَّنْ يَسْعَى بِقَلْبِهِ إِلَى مَنَازِلِ الْأَبْرَارِ بِرَحْمَتِهِ

> ... They are a people whom nobility has always followed till they were made to settle in the house of eternal abode, and they obtained rest from the movement of journeying. O' listener! If you busy yourself in advancing towards these wonderful scenes which will rush towards you, then your heart will certainly die due to an eagerness for them, and you will be prepared to seek the company of those in the graves immediately [taking your leave] from my audience here, hastening towards them. May Allah, by His mercy, include us and you too among those who strive with their hearts for the abodes of the virtuous.[1]

Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) first says:

> ... They are a people whom nobility has always followed till they were made to settle in the house of eternal abode, and they obtained rest from the movement of journeying ...

The men who are God-wary are those whom nobility has always accompanied and guided. In fact, nobility has continuously guided them throughout the entire course of their journey until Paradise. This is because neither is this world a place of rest nor is the imaginal world (*barzakh*) a place of repose. The "house of eternal abode" is only the Afterlife. Every traveller that reaches that place finds rest and an abode, and this world and the imaginal world are just stops on the way.

Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) continues:

> ... O' listener! If you busy yourself in advancing towards these wonderful scenes which will rush towards you, then your heart will certainly die due to an eagerness for them ...

If you were to know what Paradise is and what bounties are given to man after he dies, then you would enthusiastically move towards death. You would even desert me here while I am still speaking to you. Indeed, this is the nature of ordinary believers [who seek residence in Paradise]; what is to say regarding those people who seek the divine encounter with the Truth (*liqā al-haqq*).

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[1] *Ibid.*, sermon 164.

> ... and you will be prepared to seek the company of those in the graves immediately [taking your leave] from my audience here, hastening towards them ...

The Imam says: You would have left this place and you would have found a place near those people who are resting in their graves so that you could reach those blessings as soon as possible.

> ... May Allah, by His mercy, include us and you too among those who strive with their hearts for the abodes of the virtuous.

May God make both you and I of those people who strive towards the stations of the righteous with all their hearts.

Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) had a gardener who relates the following: The Commander of the Faithful (ᶜa) always used to work earnestly in order to dig up springs of water. One day he asked me for a shovel. He entered the allocated spot for digging and he worked diligently until sweat began to pour from his blessed forehead. In the end, a large slab of stone was moved away and a spring of water gushed forth (of course to have a garden in Madinah with a spring of water is very valuable). The very moment that that slab of stone moved away and water began to gush forth, Imam ᶜAlī recited the formula of endowments (*waqf*) and said: "[I proclaim that] this is a charity that will continue [to quench the thirsty even after I die]."[1]

This kind of agricultural work is not only an example of productivity but also of public service. And this type of behaviour is an example of asceticism vis-à-vis the world. Asceticism is not to idle away and be inactive. This is because hard work, productivity, and indifference to the world are all noble qualities. The very person who said, "he should know that Allah dishonoured the others when He extended the (benefits of the) world for him" is the same one who irrigates the garden in Madinah that he has cultivated with trees and then bequeaths it to the people.

This description (in which the enthusiasm for Heaven has been mentioned) is about the intermediate believers. It is not

[1] *"Hāḍihi ṣadaqatun jāriyatun"* which literally means "This is a flowing charity." [Tr.]

even possible to describe the passion of the outstanding believers.

In Sermon 182 of the *Nahj al-balāghah*, when explaining the following verse of the noble Qur'ān:

وَمَن يَتَّقِ اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّهُ مَخْرَجًا وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ

... And whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him, and provide for him from whence he does not reckon ... (65:2-3)

Imam ᶜAlī says:

وَ أُوصَاكُم بِالتَّقْوَى وَ جَعَلَهَا مُنْتَهَى رِضَاهُ وَ حَاجَتَهُ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي أَنْتُمْ بِعَيْنِهِ وَ نَوَاصِيكُمْ بِيَدِهِ وَ تَقَلُّبُكُمْ فِي قَبْضَتِهِ إِنْ أَسْرَرْتُمْ عَلِمَهُ وَ إِنْ أَعْلَنْتُمْ كَتَبَهُ قَدْ وَكَّلَ بِذَلِكَ حَفَظَةً كِرَاماً لاَ يُسْقِطُونَ حَقّاً وَ لاَ يُثْبِتُونَ بَاطِلاً وَ اعْلَمُوا أَنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجاً مِنَ الْفِتَنِ وَ نُوراً مِنَ الظُّلَمِ وَ يُخَلِّدْهُ فِيمَا اشْتَهَتْ نَفْسُهُ وَ يُنْزِلْهُ مَنْزِلَ الْكَرَامَةِ عِنْدَهُ فِي دَارٍ اصْطَنَعَهَا لِنَفْسِهِ ظِلُّهَا عَرْشُهُ وَ نُورُهَا بَهْجَتُهُ وَ زُوَّارُهَا مَلاَئِكَتُهُ وَ رُفَقَاؤُهَا رُسُلُهُ فَبَادِرُوا الْمَعَادَ وَ سَابِقُوا الآجَالَ فَإِنَّ النَّاسَ يُوشِكُ أَنْ يَنْقَطِعَ بِهِمُ الأَمَلُ وَ يَرْهَقَهُمُ الأَجَلُ وَ يُسَدَّ عَنْهُمْ بَابُ التَّوْبَةِ فَقَدْ أَصْبَحْتُمْ فِي مِثْلِ مَا سَأَلَ إِلَيْهِ الرَّجْعَةَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ وَ أَنْتُمْ بَنُو سَبِيلٍ عَلَى سَفَرٍ مِنْ دَارٍ لَيْسَتْ بِدَارِكُمْ وَ قَدْ أُوذِنْتُمْ مِنْهَا بِالارْتِحَالِ وَ أُمِرْتُمْ فِيهَا بِالزَّادِ وَ اعْلَمُوا أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ لِهَذَا الْجِلْدِ الرَّقِيقِ صَبْرٌ عَلَى النَّارِ فَارْحَمُوا نُفُوسَكُمْ فَإِنَّكُمْ قَدْ جَرَّبْتُمُوهَا فِي مَصَائِبِ الدُّنْيَا

He has advised you to exercise God-wariness and has made it the highest point of His pleasure and [has made it] all that He requires from His creatures. You should therefore be wary of God, Who is such that you are as though just in front of Him, and your forelocks are in His grip, and your change of position is in His control. If you conceal a matter, He will know of it. If you disclose a matter, He will record it. For this He has appointed noble guards [angels] who do not omit any rightful matter nor

include anything incorrect. You should know that whoever is wary of God, He would make for him a way to get out of troubles and [grant him] a light [to help him] out of darkness. He will ever keep him in whatever [condition] he wishes, and will make him stay in a position of nobility near Himself, in the house which He has made for Himself. The shade of this house is His throne, its light is His effulgence, its visitors are His angels, and its companions are His prophets. Therefore, hasten towards the place of return and go ahead of [your] deaths [by collecting provision for the next world]. Shortly, the expectations of the people will be cut short and death will overtake them while the door of repentance will be closed for them. You are still in a place to which those who were before you have been wishing to return. In this world, which is not your house, you are just a traveller in motion. You have been given the call to leave from here, and you have been ordered to collect provision while you are here. You should know that this skin cannot tolerate the Fire [of Hell]. So, have pity on yourselves because you have already tried it in the tribulations of the world.[1]

The Imam begins by saying:

> He has advised you to exercise God-wariness and has made it the highest point of His pleasure ...

God has exhorted you to God-wariness so as long as man does not adopt it, God will not be pleased with him.

> ... and [God has made God-wariness] all that He requires from His creatures. You should therefore be wary of God, who is such that you are as though just in front of Him ...

God-wariness is something that God wants from His creatures. So you should fear that Being in whose presence you are and who sees you.

> ... your forelocks are in His grip ...

This is evident from the verse:

إِمَّا مِن دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ آخِذٌ بِنَاصِيَتِهَا

[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 182.

... There is no living being but He holds it by its forelock ... (11:56)

The Imam continues:

> ... and your change of position is in His control ...

All of the conditions that you undergo are in His power.

> ... If you conceal a matter, He will know of it. If you disclose a matter, He will record it. For this He has appointed noble guards (angels) ...

These noble scribes necessitate that:

> ... they do not omit any rightful matter nor include anything incorrect ...

Neither do they forget to record something that we have done nor do they write down something that we have not.

Then the Imam continues:

> ... You should know that whoever is wary of God, He would make for him a way to get out of troubles ...

You should know that God opens up a way of escape from calamities for someone who is God-wary such that he never becomes afflicted by it. Here, the word *al-fitan* (troubles or calamities) is a plural form and has been preceded by an '*al*' [to convey universality or unconditionality]; in effect, it implies that the God-wary man will be saved from all sorts of calamities in any and all conditions.

> ... and [God will grant him] a light [to help him] out of darkness ...

This light is an example of the verse:

وَمَن يَتَّقِ اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّهُ مَخْرَجًا وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ

... And whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him, and provide for him from whence he does not reckon ... (65:2-3)

It is also an explanation of the verse:

اللَّـهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

God is the Guardian of the faithful: He brings them out of darkness into light. (2:257)

A man may be saved from calamities but this salvation may not solve [the crux of] his difficulties. Sometimes, however, not only is he saved from calamities but he also reaches a [spiritual] light. Imam ᶜAlī says that God-wariness not only removes misfortune from the God-wary (an attribute of negation) but it also brings one into the Light (an attribute of affirmation).

> ... He will ever keep him in whatever [condition] he wishes ...

He will place him eternally in those bounties that his heart yearns for.

> ... and will make him stay in a position of nobility near Himself ...

If someone gains nobility then God will take him to the abode of nobility (*dār al-karāmah*).

What is the light of that abode of nobility? Who dwells in that abode of nobility? Who are his friends in that abode of nobility? All these questions are clarified by Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*).

> ... in the house which He has made for Himself ...

In other words, one that he has chosen for Himself.

> The shade (*ẓil*) of this house is His throne,

The cool shade of that place is provided by the Throne of God. Here, the term *ẓil* does not mean 'shade' in the earthly connotation of this word since every shade depends upon a pole [i.e., any opaque object] and an external light source. In this context, the usage of *ẓil* can be a metaphor—i.e., the place is *like* a shade in so far as the ambience is pleasant and the breeze is gentle. But if *ẓil* really means a literal 'shade' having to do with the relative absence of light, then it is possible that an unseen light shines upon the lofty stations of existence and from there casts a shadow upon Paradise.

> ... its light is His effulgence ...

The elation (*ibtihāj*) of the Divine and the resplendence (*bahjah*) of the Truth illuminates the abode of nobility. After all, there is

no notion of sun or moon there [that could potentially illuminate the atmosphere]:

مُّتَّكِـِٔينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ ۖ لَا يَرَوْنَ فِيهَا شَمْسًا وَلَا زَمْهَرِيرًا

Reclining therein on couches. They will find in it neither any [scorching] sun, nor any [biting] cold. (76:13)

What illuminates the vast home of the believer in which all of the people of the world may fit? The sun does not have the power to illuminate such an enormous home. This is because even if the sun were to exist there, it could only illuminate a corner of such an immense abode. In reality, it is the Owner of this house that will Himself illuminate it.

> ... its visitors are His angels ...

The guests that will visit this house are the angels of the Truth. They will come in hopes of visiting the believer.

> ... and its companions are His prophets ...

His friends in this abode are the prophets.

> ... Therefore, hasten towards the place of return and go ahead of [your] deaths [by collecting provision for the next world] ...

So hurry towards the Resurrection and be ahead in embracing death.

After a few lines, the Imam (ᶜa) continues:

> ... In this world, which is not your house, you are just a traveller in motion ...

You are a traveller [*ibn sabīl*, lit.: "son of the way"] who has been stranded along the way. You are a traveller and this realm is not your abode.

> You have been given the call to leave from here, and you have been ordered to collect provision while you are here.

In the next line, Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) switches focus from desire to fear. In essence, he is saying the following: You should know

that if there is no zeal in you for that station [described above—i.e., the abode of nobility] then at least there should be some fear of hell in you.

These motivations, however, do not exist at the same level. In other words, the motivations for worshipping God—whether it be out of the desire for Paradise or the fear of hell or the love of God—are not mutually exclusive of one another. Rather, they are "vertically aligned". He who worships out of the love of God also possesses fear [of hell] and passion [for Paradise]. On the contrary, for those whose main motivation to worship is out of fear of hell or out of desire for Paradise, they do not have the love of God.

So when we see that in some of the Imams' litanies there are times when they cry out of fear of the possibility of being punished and there are other times when they express their passion towards Paradise, while all along they tell us that they only worship God out of love for Him, this is because these three matters are not on the same horizontal plane; they exist on a vertical hierarchy. Of course, it is possible for fear and desire to be horizontally aligned with one another but when they are compared to the worship of the freemen (*aḥrār*), they exist on a lower vertical plane.

As a general rule, he who possesses the higher station necessarily has the lower ones as well. It is for this reason that the litanies and whispered prayers of the Imams (*ʿa*) sometimes mentions the fear of hell, sometimes the desire for Paradise, and sometimes the love of God—the latter, of course, is the ultimate goal. Therefore it is not right to say that these three are horizontally aligned with one another and that the Imams who have reached the station of the freemen should not worship out of fear of hell or out of a desire for Paradise.

With this in mind, the Imam concludes this section of the sermon:

> ... You should know that this frail skin cannot tolerate the Fire [of hell]. So, have pity on yourselves because you have already tried it in the tribulations of the world ...

In other words, time and time again, you have tested yourself and you know that your frail and brittle skin cannot even bear

the fire of this world, so have mercy on your own selves [and save your skin from that dreaded Fire which is certainly much harder to bear]. Even if you have not reached the station of worshipping God out of love for Him, at least worship him out of fear of the hellfire and do not commit sins.

In yet another sermon, Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) says the following:

وَ لَقَدْ عَلِمَ الْمُسْتَحْفَظُونَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ مُحَمَّدٍ- صلى الله عليه واله-
أَنِّي لَمْ أُرِدَّ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَ لاَ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ سَاعَةً قَطُّ وَ لَقَدْ وَاسَيْتُهُ
بِنَفْسِي فِي الْمَوَاطِنِ الَّتِي تَنْكُصُ فِيهَا الأَبْطَالُ وَ تَتَأَخَّرُ فِيهَا
الأَقْدَامُ نَجْدَةً أَكْرَمَنِي اللَّهُ بِهَا

> Those companions of Muḥammad—the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his descendants—who were the custodians [of divine messages] know that I never disobeyed Allah or His Messenger—the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his descendants—for even a moment, and by virtue of the courage with which Allah honoured me I supported him with my life on occasions when even the brave turned away and feet remained behind [instead of proceeding forward].[i]

In other words, all the companions, historians, and those who witnessed the events of Islam know that I never acted in disobedience to the orders of God and His Prophet even for a single second. I safeguarded the holy Prophet with my life in those situations where many people were scared and many brave warriors fled out of fear. This was a bravery that God honoured me by and ennobled me with.

In another place, he says the following based upon this very principle:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَ الْمَوْتِ، الْقَتْلُ

> Truly, the most noble of deaths is to be killed [in the Path of God][ii]

If dying in the way of God is the most noble of deaths then the person who undertakes dangerous feats on His Path is the most

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[i] *Ibid.*, sermon 196 [197 or 188 in some versions].
[ii] *Ibid.*, saying 122.

noble of people. If there is no death equal to the death of a martyr, then the most noble of deaths is that of a martyr. Therefore, he who stands up to aid religion and forgoes his life on this path when necessity calls for it has reached the heights of God-wariness—heights that no one else has reached. He has understood that which he must understand with the power of demonstration, accepted it with the strength of his faith, and staunchly defended this belief as he should have.[i]

If faith and its defence become strong then "holding on with power"[ii] will be achieved. When "holding on with power" is achieved then God-wariness is strong. When God-wariness is strong then nobility is also strong. It is for this reason that the Imam says: "Truly, the most noble of deaths is to be killed [in the Path of God]."[iii]

Just as the fear of enemies is one of the obstacles on the path of nobility, lust for the natural pleasures is also counted as one of its impediments and a bandit on the path of the wayfarers traveling up the mountain of nobility. So just as Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) was protected from the bandit of natural pleasures as a result of harmonizing his power of attraction, he was also safeguarded from the snares and ambushes of fear of the enemies as a result of harmonizing his powers of repulsion and anger. The necessary corollary of Imam ᶜAlī's phrase, "by virtue of the courage with which Allah honoured me" (implying that this courage was certainly a noble trait that God had given him), is that if someone is not brave and becomes afflicted with attributes that are opposite to it [such as cowardliness] then he will be disgraced and will be denied the opportunity to be ennobled by the Truth.

As for the wise sayings of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*), one that is relevant to our discussion is the following:

لاَ مَالَ أَعْوَدُ مِنَ الْعَقْلِ، وَلاَ وَحْدَةَ أَوْحَشُ مِنَ الْعُجْبِ ، وَلاَ عَقْلَ
كَالتَّدْبِيرِ، وَلاَ كَرَمَ كَالتَّقْوَى، وَلاَ قَرِينَ كَحُسْنِ الْخُلْقِ
وَلاَ مِيرَاثَ كَالأَدَبِ، وَلاَ قَائِدَ كَالتَّوْفِيقِ، وَلاَ تِجَارَةَ كَالْعَمَلِ الصَّالِحِ،

[i] An allusion by the author to the section at the beginning of this chapter: "Knowledge and Righteous Actions: the Basis of God-wariness." [Ed.]
[ii] A reference to the Qur'ānic verses 2:62 and 7:171.
[iii] *Nahj al-balāghah*, saying 122.

وَلاَ رِبْحَ كَالثَّوَابِ، وَلاَ وَرَعَ كَالْوُقُوفِ عِنْدَ الشُّبْهَةِ، وَلاَ زُهْدَ كَالزُّهْدِ فِي الْحَرَامِ، وَلاَ عِلْمَ كَالتَّفَكُّرِ، وَلاَ عِبَادَةَ كَأَدَاءِ الْفَرَائِضِ، وَلاَ إِيمَانَ كَالْحَيَاءِ وَالصَّبْرِ، وَلاَ حَسَبَ كَالتَّوَاضُعِ، وَلاَ شَرَفَ كَالْعِلْمِ، وَلاَ عِزَّ كَالْحِلْمِ. وَلاَ مُظَاهَرَةَ أَوْثَقُ مِنَ الْمُشَاوَرَةِ

There is no wealth more profitable than wisdom and no loneliness more estranging than vanity; there is no intelligence like discretion, *no nobility like God-wariness*, no companion like the goodness of moral character, no inheritance like civility, no guide like promptitude, no trade like virtuous acts, no profit like Divine reward, no self-control like inaction in time of doubt, no renunciation like the renunciation from prohibitions, no knowledge like contemplation, no worship like fulfilling obligations, no belief like modesty and patience, no attainment like humility, no honour like knowledge, and no power like forbearance; there is no support more reliable than consultation.[1]

If someone becomes afflicted with the covetousness of wealth to the extent that it becomes a bandit on his path, then he should know that there is no wealth more valuable than the intellect. None of these things should become bandits on your path [to nobility] and none of them should distract you [from your goal]. If you fear loneliness then vanity is something to fear while other than vanity is not like this. If you are thinking about wisdom then you should organize your affairs. If you desire nobility then nobility cannot be acquired without God-wariness. If you want to find a companion then there is no companion like moral character. This is because all of man's companions will eventually depart from him at one point in time. It is only his moral character that will remain with man forever.

These have been mentioned by Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) one after another. He has wisely explained some of those impediments that obstruct man from gaining God-wariness and nobility and those factors that cause them to come into being. If someone

[1] *Ibid.*, saying 113 (109 or 110 in some versions).

wants to become noble by some other means or distances himself from that which leads to nobility, then he has gone astray. In this statement many of those things that cause or hinder God-wariness and nobility have been enumerated.

As a reminder from our previous analysis, nobility follows from God-wariness, God-wariness follows from "holding on with power", "holding on with power" is through faith and righteous action, and faith is not possible without knowledge. From this we can deduce that knowledge is the real source for all these perfections.

Now, if the knowledge that man has is "acquired knowledge" or "discursive knowledge" (*ʿilm-e ḥuṣulī*) then it is possible that he may not reach his spiritual destination; if, however, his knowledge is "knowledge by presence" (*ʿilm-e ḥuḍurī*) and mystic witnessing (*shuhūd*) then it guarantees all those other perfections. This is because it is not possible that someone openly witnesses the Truth and still attaches his heart to the material world. Imam ʿAlī has said: If you were aware of what Paradise is and were enthusiastic about it, you would have left my gathering and have gone to the graveyards.[i] The secret of this matter is that the passion for Paradise does not allow the man of gnosis to fall in love with the world. Acquired knowledge, however, is sometimes effective [in attaining perfections] and sometimes not. He says: If you saw what I saw, if you tasted what I taste, and if you were witness to what I witnessed, then you would never live your life in the same way again.

In some of the traditions of the holy Prophet, he has said: If you knew what I knew then you would not bury many of your dead. I am aware of their secrets and you are oblivious of them. When you bury one of them you say: "O God! We have not seen from them anything but good" (whether absolute good or relative good). This is because you are unaware of what is inside their souls. If you knew what was within their souls then you would not bury them.

Another possible interpretation for this saying is that if you knew what went on in the graves then you would never be

[i] A reference to sermon 164 in the *Nahj al-balāghah* mentioned earlier. [Ed.]

ready to hand over your friends to the snakes and the scorpions that await the dead therein.

By means of the preceding explanation the difference between "acquired knowledge" (that is sometimes separate from action) and "knowledge by presence" (which is always accompanied with righteous actions) becomes very clear. The distinction of that God-wariness that stems from the former over the God-wariness that issues from the latter also becomes understandable.

A Summary of our Discussion

To conclude our discussion, we know that nobility cannot be obtained except with God-wariness. God-wariness cannot be acquired except by "holding on with power." "Holding on with power" cannot be acquired except through the power of the heart and the power of the body.

Of course, these two powers are not on par with one another; rather the power of the body follows from the power of the heart. The proof of this is the tradition that was mentioned in the previous discussion where it was stated from the sixth Imam: "The body of the strong-willed shall never become weak."[i] In other words, if someone's intention and resolve were to be strong, the body will not show any type of weakness.

Therefore, with regard to the narration [quoted at the beginning of this session] in which the author of *Maḥāsin Barqī* relates from the sixth Imam—wherein the Imam says that "holding on with power" depends upon two factors: one is the power of our heart and the other is the power of our bodies—it should be clear that these [two powers] are not at par with one another. Rather, one is principal and the other is subsidiary; one is spirit while the other is matter. The power of the body follows from the power of the heart because the body itself depends upon the heart. Therefore, it is not possible that the qualities of the body be at par with those of the heart.

Now if the body is secondary and the heart is essential—as is in accordance with what is related by Imam Ṣādiq (*ʿa*): "the

[i] *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, v. 4, p. 400, no. 5859.

essence of man is his *lubb* (core, heart, or intellect)"[i]—then it is not correct to say that the power of the body and that of the heart are equal to one another. Just as the body is itself secondary and the heart is essential, the power of the body is secondary while the power of the heart is essential.

From our analysis, that which is pivotal is the following conclusion: the root of all the sources of nobility lies in knowledge.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

[i] *Amāli Sadūq*, session 42, no. 9.

Session Nine

A Reminder and an Elaboration

Our discussion was about the nobility of man in the noble Qur'ān. As you have noted, man's nobility depends upon his God-wariness, both of which are qualities of the soul. Now if one quality of the soul (i.e. nobility) depends upon another quality of the soul (i.e. God-wariness) then, by necessity, it does so in its existence and non-existence, its generation and perpetuation, and its strength and weakness. This is a concomitant of the dependence of one characteristic of the soul on another. Also in the previous discussion it was established that the prerequisite of nobility is both correct knowledge (*ʿilm ṣaḥīh*) and righteous deeds (*ʿamal ṣāliḥ*)—i.e., not just knowledge on its own nor simply action on its own. Therefore, God-wariness will be obtained only when we have both true knowledge and righteous deeds. Now just as nobility depends in its various aspects upon God-wariness, God-wariness in its turn is dependent on true knowledge and righteous actions in the aforementioned features. In other words, God-wariness depends upon knowledge and righteous actions in its existence and non-existence, its generation and perpetuation, and its strength and weakness.

Some of the verses of the noble Qur'ān consider the fulfilment of divine obligations (such as performing the obligatory acts and staying away from the forbidden deeds) to be the grounds by means of which God-wariness can emerge. Now this does not mean that God-wariness solely comes about by means of virtuous actions and that knowledge has no say in the matter whatsoever. Similarly, the fact that there are other verses which deem that God-wariness exists in the shade of knowledge and wisdom does not imply that righteous deeds have no effect on it at all. Rather, one group of verses explains the dependence of God-wariness on righteous action while another group of verses relates the dependence of God-wariness on knowledge and correct understanding.

Now because there are two types of knowledge—"acquired knowledge" (*ʿilm ḥuṣūlī*) and "knowledge by presence" (*ʿilm*

ḥuḍūrī), which is also called "knowledge through witnessing" (*ʿilm shuhūdī*)—God-wariness can also be divided into two in the sense that the cognitive aspects of God-wariness can be obtained both through the path of mystical witnessing and the path of discursive knowledge (which consists of conception, affirmation, and demonstration). The noble Qur'ān, which invites people towards acquiring nobility and God-wariness, contains several verses regarding the attainment of God-wariness both through acquired knowledge as well as mystical witnessing. A sample of such verses will be related in the forthcoming discussions *inshā Allah*.

God-wariness Depends upon Righteous Actions

Verse 21 of the blessed Surah Baqarah alludes to the fact that God-wariness depends upon the performance of obligatory actions.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِن
قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O mankind! Worship your Lord, who created you and those who were before you, so that you may be God-wary. (2:21)

This verse considers God-wariness to be dependent upon the worship of God. In other word, obeying God is the grounds through which God-wariness can be obtained.

Verse 177 of the blessed Surah Baqarah (which contains many of the divine obligations) is as follows:

لَّيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَن تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ
وَلَـكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّـهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ
وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ

Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, piety is [personified by] those who have faith in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets ... (2:177)

This part of the verse relates to piety and righteousness in faith.

وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ

... and who give their wealth, for the love of Him, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller and the beggar, and for [the freeing of] the slaves ... (2:177)

This part pertains to piety and righteousness in economic matters.

وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ

... and maintain the prayer and give the zakat ... (2:177)

This part pertains to piety and righteousness in worship that we perform with our bodies and our wealth.

وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا

... and those who fulfil their covenants, when they pledge themselves ... (2:177)

This part relates to piety, righteousness, steadfastness, and resolve in our personal and social affairs.

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

... They are the ones who are true [to their covenant], and it is they who are the God-wary. (2:177)

Hence, if man should combine in himself faith [as stated in the former part of the verse] and righteous deeds [as described in the latter part of the verse] then he will be God-wary. Therefore, God-wariness can be obtained by means of faith and righteous deeds. Faith, in itself, is an action that is performed by the heart; hence, it is part of action and not knowledge for it is an "act" of the heart. That which is between a man's soul and his faith is the will [that is to say if man wants to have faith in something then he must will to do so]. The case is different in knowledge. When the preliminaries of knowledge are found in man, he must necessarily affirm the conclusion. However, in the former case, he understands the subject, but with regard to his acceptance of it and his submission towards it, he is free. It is

possible that he understands something with certainty and yet not have faith in it:

وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا

They impugned them—though they were convinced in their hearts—wrongfully and defiantly. (27:14)

Faith is a type of act and is mentioned as part of practical God-wariness (*taqwāye ᶜamalī*). It is not like knowledge such that it be part of intellective God-consciousness (*taqwāye ᶜilmī*).

In Surah Baqarah, verse 179, the implementation of retribution has been counted as something that prepares the grounds for God-wariness.

وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

There is life for you in retribution, O you who possess intellects! Maybe you will be God-wary! (2:179)

Similarly, in verse 183 of the same surah, fasting in the holy month of Ramaḍān has been considered the grounds for acquiring God-wariness:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God-wary. (2:183)

Therefore, these types of obligatory acts pave the way for acquiring God-wariness just as guarding oneself from forbidden acts does the same as well. This is because man must be God-wary both when he follows divine commandments and when he keeps away from divine prohibitions as is illustrated in the second verse of the Surah Mā'idah:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُحِلُّوا شَعَائِرَ اللَّـهِ وَلَا الشَّهْرَ الْحَرَامَ وَلَا الْهَدْيَ وَلَا الْقَلَائِدَ وَلَا آمِّينَ الْبَيْتَ الْحَرَامَ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرِضْوَانًا ۚ وَإِذَا حَلَلْتُمْ فَاصْطَادُوا ۚ وَلَا

يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَآنُ قَوْمٍ أَن صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَن تَعْتَدُوا

O you who have faith! Do not violate Allah's sacraments, neither the sacred month, nor the offering, nor the necklaces, nor those bound for the Sacred House who seek their Lord's grace and [His] pleasure. But when you emerge from pilgrim sanctity you may hunt for game. Ill feeling for a people should not lead you, because they barred you from [entering] the Sacred Mosque, to transgress ... (5:2)

In other words, the transgression of certain people should not compel you to oppression and animosity [towards them]. There verse continues:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ ۖ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّـهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

... Cooperate in piety and God-wariness, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression, and be wary of Allah. Indeed Allah is severe in retribution. (5:2)

The last sentence [i.e., "do not cooperate in sin ..."] invites people to God-wariness in terms of keeping away from sins whereas the first part [i.e., "cooperate in piety and ..."] invites people towards God-wariness in terms of carrying out the divine obligations.

Therefore, we must be God-wary by staying away from sin and by fulfilling our necessary tasks and obligatory duties. These verses bear testimony that God-wariness depends on righteous deeds.

God-consciousness Depends upon Knowledge

Another group of verses indicates that in the same way that God-wariness is dependent on righteous deeds, it is also dependent on correct vision. In other words, just as man must be God-wary in the domain of action, he must also be God-conscious in the domain of knowledge. The practical God-wariness of a person demands that he not relinquish an obligatory action;

rather he should perform it for the sake of God while preserving its conditions and guarding himself from impediments.

The intellective God-consciousness of a person demands that he be cognizant of acquiring knowledge and that he stay away from simple ignorance (*jahl basīṭ*).[i] In his acquisition of knowledge, he must also know the conditions for becoming learned and the impediments to it so that he does not become afflicted with compounded ignorance (*jahl murakkab*). When he sets his mind to save himself from simple ignorance and to escape from the clutch of compounded ignorance, he must strive to gain knowledge for the Face of God (*wajh Allah*).[ii] It is only then that he can become a true scholar. This is intellective God-wariness.

If someone wishes to achieve nobility, he cannot do so solely through righteous deeds; at the most, he will only have achieved a weak level of nobility. Of course, if that is all that the person desires—i.e., if he only wishes to gain the lower levels of nobility—the customary righteous deeds will suffice. However, if he truly wishes to be counted amongst the noble ones then he has no option but to gain intellective God-consciousness.

It should be clear that the nobility that we refer to here is nobility with God (*ʿind Allah*) not nobility in the eyes of people (*ʿind al-nās*). This is because our discussion started from this point that God-wariness is the basis of nobility, the most important proof of which was the following verse:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

Indeed the noblest of you with Allah is the most God-wary among you. (49:13)

In some of the sayings of Imam ʿAlī (*ʿa*) he says that it is possible that some sins may cause one to become noble in the eyes of men. They may say, "What a noble man!" But the very act that made him "noble" in society could, in fact, make him abject

[i] "Simple ignorance" is when one is ignorant of a matter but is aware of his own ignorance. This is contrasted to "compounded ignorance", which is when the individual is ignorant of a matter but does not realize it; instead, he believes his understanding is correct. [Tr.]

[ii] Refer to Session Seven in the section "The Outlook of the Noble Ones" where the author discusses the 'Face of God'. [Ed.]

and disgraced in the eyes of God. So nobility among the people can coexist with debasement in the sight of God. Of course, this is a topic on its own. That which is the focus of our present discussion, however, is nobility in the sight of God.

Practical God-wariness is where action is fundamental; its conditions are considered, its impediments avoided, and it is done for the sake of God. In practical God-wariness, four elements must be present: (1) man must strive to move towards action; (2) he must perform the action with all of its conditions; (3) he must purify it from everything that may prevent it from being accepted by God; and (4) the entire work, from its beginning till its end, must be performed for the sake of God. In this case, the action will be a righteous action that prepares the ground for God-wariness.

These four elements are also present in intellective God-consciousness as well: (1) man must strive towards gaining knowledge; (2) he must secure the factors that enable one to become a scholar; (3) he must eradicate those things that impede the acquisition of true knowledge; and (4) this entire scholastic endeavour to become a scholar must be for the sake of God. It is only after all of this that he may become one of the divine scholars. In this case, because he has gained intellective God-consciousness, the grounds for nobility are prepared.

Verse 6 of the blessed Surah Yunus considers a divine world view as a factor in the emergence of God-consciousness:

إِنَّ فِي اخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّـهُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَ الْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَّقُونَ

Indeed in the alternation of night and day, and whatever Allah has created in the heavens and the earth, there are surely signs for a people who are God-wary. (10:6)

Truly the recurring alternation of night and day (throughout the various seasons) and also that which God has created in the heavens and the earth are divine signs for those who are wary and conscious of God. What is intended by God-wariness, in this verse, is intellective God-consciousness which is accompanied by contemplation and demonstration. Now, those who

have intellective God-consciousness are more capable of possessing practical God-wariness. However, the person who only has righteous deeds but is not concerned about proving the veracity of his beliefs, the particular system of night and day and that of heaven and earth is not a sign for him. If someone only had an imitative form of faith, he will not be of those who possess a world-view. He only has practical God-wariness but is deprived of intellective God-consciousness.

In the above noble verse, God says that the alteration of night and day and that which God has created in the heaven and the earth are signs of God for those people that have intellective God-consciousness—i.e., those who are of insight, who ponder well, and who gain the aforementioned things one after another for the sake of God. This is intellective God-consciousness obtained through demonstration, or in other words, through the way of acquired knowledge.

Mystic Witnessing: the Basis of a Loftier God-consciousness

More important than discursive proof, which was mentioned in the verse above, is the knowledge attained through witnessing (*ʿilm shuhūdī*) wherein a person has access to knowledge of God Almighty through knowledge of his own soul, or self-knowledge. The God-consciousness related to mystic witnessing has been mentioned in verse 18 of Surah Ḥashr:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ وَلْتَنظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ ۖ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّـهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah [have God-consciousness], and let every soul see what it sends ahead for the morrow, and be wary of Allah [have God-consciousness]. Allah is indeed well aware of what you do. (59:18)

We do not know of any other verse that has invited people twice to God-consciousness in a sentence as small as this one. These two instances are like two boundaries that enclose something in the middle. This is because God first says, "O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah," then He says, "Let every soul see what it sends ahead for the morrow," and finally, "And be wary of

Allah." God has invited us to God-consciousness twice in this verse so that we are wary and conscious of Him both when we watch over our souls (*murāqibah*) and also when we take account of ourselves (*muḥasibah*).

The statement [in the middle] "Let every soul see what it sends ahead for the morrow" means that every soul should see what it has prepared for tomorrow. The Resurrection should be so certain for him that it is as if it will happen tomorrow—in other words, it should be both a certainty and something close by in his eyes. The fact that the Resurrection is described as being *ghadin* (tomorrow) is because it is an inevitable fact and close at hand. After all, God has explicitly stated both facts in the Qur'ān. With regards to its certainty, He says:

وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ لَّا رَيْبَ فِيهَا

And the Hour is bound to come, there is no doubt in it ... (22:7)

As for its nearness, He says:

وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا

And We see it to be near. (70:7)

So there is no doubt that the Greater Resurrection (*qiyāmah kubrā*)[10] will occur in the briefest period of time, let alone the lesser resurrection (*qiyāmah sughrā*) which occurs for each individual at the moment of his death: "Whosoever dies, his resurrection has certainly commenced."[i] Therefore, it is because of the inevitability and proximity of the Resurrection that the term *ghadin* (tomorrow) has been used.

Let us return back to the verse, "Let every soul see what it sends ahead for the morrow." To see something without having knowledge of the soul and without knowing about its health, ailments, and cure is impossible. So long as a man is incapable of recognizing his soul and of knowing its benefits and losses, he cannot be of those who take account of themselves (*muḥāsabah*). So long as man cannot contemplate within the core of his being, he will be unqualified in formulating a view or opinion. Moreover, the condition for a man to formulate a view [i.e., to

[i] *al-Maḥajjah al-bayḍā'*, v. 8, p. 297.

take account of himself] is that prior to it he must have been vigilant (*murāqabah*) with regards to what he has done and not done. He must remember each and every act of his and be meticulous when taking account of himself.

It is possible for a man to say that he has prepared a good provision for the Resurrection while remembering each and every act of his; in other words, it is possible for him to be of those who are completely vigilant. There are others, however, who only remember the good they have done but forget the bad and the mistakes that they have committed—as such, they are not of those who are vigilant and they do not possess the "God-consciousness of vigilance" (*taqwā murāqabī*). Before a man can reach the station of vigilance, he must have the God-consciousness of vigilance. In other words, when recording his good acts [as they are being done], he must not be neglectful with regard to recording his bad ones as well. Moreover, in discerning between good and bad he must be precise and God-wary. He should know whether he has performed something for God or for his lower self.

Therefore, to formulate a view [regarding oneself] is not only preceded by God-consciousness but it is also followed by God-consciousness. Man must be God-conscious when he scribes into his mental book of memories—he must not underemphasize or overemphasize anything [i.e., at the stage of *murāqabah*]. He must do the same when taking account of himself and summarizing [i.e., at the stage of *muḥāsabah*]. It is this type of God-wariness that is related to self-knowledge, knowledge through witnessing, and knowledge by presence.

Man must be conscious of God even before he begins to take account of himself. The 'God-consciousness' that is intended in this verse, as can be gathered from the context [of "let every soul see ...], is God-consciousness with regard to the soul—first when it comes to being vigilant over one's soul and second when it comes to taking account of one's soul.

Man must be a God-conscious watchman (*raqīb*) over himself. The reason that a 'watchman' is called '*raqīb*' [from the verb *raqaba* meaning 'to be heedful' and the noun *raqabah* meaning 'neck'] is because such a person extends his neck out. He has complete control over himself and he is careful that nothing gets

missed. So God says that we should try and be like a watchman who has authority over others—i.e., we should stretch our neck out and be a watchman over our own selves. Everything that issues from our souls should be taken note of.

This is God-consciousness when it comes to being vigilant. Hence God first tells us, "O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah". Then, "let every soul see what it sends ahead for the morrow." As for how each person should perform this "seeing", God provides the answer: "and be wary of Allah"—i.e., this second command to God-consciousness is with regard to taking account of oneself, while the first had to do with being vigilant.

This God-consciousness which is related to the witnessing of the soul and the vigilance over one's intentions, decisions, etc. has nothing to do with acquired knowledge or formal studying. It is possible that someone be very strong and bright in the field of discursive knowledge and in formulating various demonstrations to prove that the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs of God but when he comes close to sin he is not able to control himself. This person has God-wariness in the field of discursive knowledge but he does not have God-consciousness with regard to knowledge attained by witnessing. He is not of those who are vigilant over themselves, who take account of themselves, and who constantly weigh the pros and cons before deciding anything.

Therefore, if someone wishes to achieve nobility, not only must he embark on the existential journey of righteous deeds with regards to both its dimensions—i.e., performing that which is preferred and avoiding that which is detested—but he must also possess a divine world view in his intellectual journey which is the God-consciousness pertaining to acquired knowledge and demonstration. In addition to this, he must also possess a God-consciousness pertaining to "knowledge by presence" with regard to matters of witnessing, self-knowledge, guarding one's soul, and taking one's soul to account. Such people are God-conscious to the extent that they focus on their knowledge. They have acquired the disposition of God-consciousness; alongside it, they have formed a disposition to nobility.

Nobility may be a trait of the soul but *it is not* directly related to the external world. That quality *which is* directly related to the external world is God-wariness, and one of its corollaries is nobility as stated by the noble Qur'ān: "the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-wary among you" (49:13).

Who are the Most God-wary?

In so far as the Qur'ān is a light, it does not speak in generalities and mere mental constructs without explicitly stating examples. There is no matter in the Qur'ān that could be described as unclear or vague. Of course, it is possible that a verse or some verses appear ambiguous for certain people; but it is not possible for an issue in a particular verse to be unclear in and of itself. If a particular matter does not seem evident [to us] then God will shed some light on it through other verses. This is because God has said that all of the contents of the Qur'ān are light. Light is always at odds with [the darkness of] ambiguity. Therefore, if the Qur'ān states that the noblest of men are the most God-wary of them, then God certainly clarifies who the most God-wary of people are.

In verse 17 and onwards of Surah Layl, God has introduced the most God-wary in the following way.

وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الْأَتْقَى الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّىٰ وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِندَهُ مِن
نِّعْمَةٍ تُجْزَىٰ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَىٰ وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَىٰ

The most God-wary shall be spared that—he who gives his wealth to purify himself and does not expect any reward from anyone, but seeks only the pleasure [lit. Face] of his Lord, the Most Exalted, and, surely, soon he will be well-pleased. (92:17-21)

Who are those who will be saved from the fire of hell? Who are those who are far from its flames? They are the most God-wary ones. Who can be described as the most God-wary? The first quality is: "He who gives his wealth to purify himself" (92:18). It is someone who gives his wealth for the good pleasure of God so that he may become purified. Of course, if it is possible for him not to take the wealth in the first place and thus avoid sullying his soul it is better. But if he happens to take this wealth,

he must bestow it in the way of God so that he may become of those who are purified.

Now by giving his wealth, he does not seek to compensate the difficulties that were borne by others since if someone benefited from the efforts of others and then sought to balance the equation by giving some of that wealth away as alms then this kind of monetary charity does not lay the grounds for spiritual purification. Someone who performs this kind of charity is not of the most God-wary. Rather, he has only acted upon one of the most basic obligations that are required from him.

Now since this kind of fiscal charity [out of compensation] does not cause one to be more God-wary, God has said: "And does not expect any reward from anyone" (92:19). The most God-wary person is not the one who had a blessing that was given to him from someone else and who is now charitable as a recompense for that blessing.

What, then, is that charity that causes one to become of the most God-wary? It is a charity of the following type: "But seeks only the pleasure [lit. Face] of his Lord, the Most Exalted (*al-al-aʿlā*)" (92:20). In other words if someone moves towards God—who is the Exalted (*al-ʿalī*) and Most Exalted (*al-aʿlā*)—he will become the most God-wary (*atqā*) and the most noble (*akram*).

But what is the wayfarer's true goal? What is the extent of that goal? At certain times, we are asked to say, "Immaculate is my Lord, the all-Supreme (*al-aẓīm*), and with His praise [I glorify Him]." At other times, we are asked to say, "Immaculate is my Lord, the *most* Exalted (*al-aʿlā*), and with His praise [I glorify Him]."[11] The fact is, however, that the very One who is the all-Supreme is also the most Exalted. The difference is that at the beginning of the journey, we know Him as 'exalted' and 'supreme' but after traversing for a while, we come to know him as the '*most* exalted' and the '*most* supreme'. In His essence, however, he is both the most Exalted and the most Supreme.

Man is closer to God when he is in prostration (*sajdah*) then when he is bowing (*rukūʿ*). Since he is closer to the earth [in prostration] he is more self-effacing. This is why the best state during prayers is the very state of prostration—the state when man rubs his face on the earth. In God's presence, the more one lowers and humbles oneself, the more he can feel the greatness

of God. This is why our oration during the prostration is more profound than our oration while bowing. While bowing, we say, "Immaculate is my Lord, the all-Supreme (*al-aẓīm*) ..." whereas in our prostration we say, "Immaculate is my Lord, the *most* Exalted (*al-aʿlā*) ..."

Granted that the Exalted and the Most Exalted are one and the same, the question is this: if someone desires to be of the *most* God-wary, does he worship God the Exalted or God the *most* Exalted? The outlook of someone who wants to be of the *most* God-wary is more profound [than the one who just wants to be God-wary]—he thinks of God in better terms and with loftier attributes and in the presence of God, his worship is of greater quality. As a result, he will be of the *most* God-wary and the *most* noble because he has a connection with the *most* Exalted. If, on the other hand, his outlook, his vigilance, and his righteous deeds are not as profound [compared to one who is *most* God-wary], then he will be God-wary and noble, and he will be in connection with God, the Supreme, the Exalted.

So, he who becomes the most God-wary also becomes the most noble. The reason he can become the most God-wary is because he has a connection with the most Exalted. Hence, God says in the verse that we are discussing:

إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَىٰ

But seeks only the pleasure [lit. Face] of his Lord, the most Exalted.
(92:20)

He who works for the most Exalted God—who is at the height of exaltedness—can have access to the ranks of the most God-wary.

In the previous discussions, we had spoken about the Face of God (*wajh Allah*) and how that which is everlasting and will never be annihilated is called the Face of God. Even when the Trumpet is blown and all beings die, the Face of God will remain alive and will never cease to exist. This is because the Trumpet and the Command of Death are all part of the Face of God.

God ends the Surah with:

وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَىٰ

and, surely, soon he will be well-pleased. (92:21)

God bestows on the most God-wary to such an extent that he becomes well-pleased and well-satisfied. One of the most evident examples of this part of the verse, are the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt, and in particular, Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa).

Summary

To summarize, we have said that nobility is a quality of the soul and is not directly connected to the external world; rather, it is the product of another characteristic of the soul [which is directly connected to the external world] and that is God-wariness. We also stated that if one quality of the soul is dependent on another, then its existence and non-existence, generation and perpetuation, and strength and weakness would also depend upon it. God-wariness is a characteristic of the soul that cannot be obtained simply with action just as it cannot be acquired solely with knowledge; rather it is obtained with both righteous deeds and true knowledge. Righteous deeds can be defined as performing the obligatory deeds and staying away from the prohibited acts. True knowledge, whether it is from demonstration or witnessing, is related to the knowledge of the Truth, the origin, the resurrection, and other related topics. Inevitably, the more profound this knowledge is the more profound God-wariness and nobility will be.

Nobility in the words of the Commander of the Faithful

In the previous session, we presented examples from the words of Imam ᶜAlī, all of which pertained to the topic at hand. They spoke of the dependency of nobility upon both the practical and intellective forms of God-wariness and the fact that neither of these two is attainable without observing the necessary conditions, without abstaining from impediments, and without seeking the pleasure of God whether it be in intellectual matters or in practical matters. Just as the wise words of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) speak about the concomitants and conditions of God-

wariness, in the same way, the description of the God-wary can also found in his most effulgent words.

In the very first sermon of the *Nahj al-balāghah*, certain traits of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) have been mentioned. There Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) says:

أَكْرَمَهُ عَنْ دَارِ الدُّنْيَا وَرَغِبَ بِهِ عَنْ مُقَامِ البَلْوَى

> God regarded him [the Prophet] too noble for this world and desired to remove him from this place of trial.[i]

God honoured His prophet by not allowing his hands to be sullied by the world. God is saying to His prophet: You are a noble being; it is not befitting for a noble person to taint himself with the natural world.

فَقَبَضَهُ إِلَيْهِ كَرِيماً رَسُولَ الله صَلَّى الله عَلَيْهِ وَآلِه، وَخَلَّفَ فِيكُمْ مَا خَلَّفَتِ الأَنْبِيَاءُ فِي أُمَمِها، إِذْ لَم يَتْرُكُوهُمْ هَمَلاً، بِغَيْرِ طَرِيقٍ وَاضِحٍ، وَلاَعَلَمٍ قَائِمٍ

> So He drew him towards Himself with nobility. May Allah shower His blessing on him and his progeny. But the Prophet left among you the same which other prophets left among their peoples, because prophets do not leave them untended [in the dark] without a clear path and a standing ensign.[ii]

In Sermon 86, he says the following about his own characteristics:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، خُذُوهَا عَنْ خَاتَمِ النَّبِيِّينَ (صلى الله عليه وآله): «إِنَّهُ يَمُوتُ مَنْ مَاتَ مِنَّا وَلَيْسَ بِمَيِّت، وَيَبْلَى مَنْ بَلِيَ مِنَّا وَلَيْسَ بِبَالٍ»، فَلاَ تَقُولُوا بِمَا لاَتَعْرِفُونَ، فَإِنَّ أَكْثَرَ الْحَقِّ فِيمَا تُنْكِرُونَ، وَاعْذِرُوا مَنْ لاَ حُجَّةَ لَكُمْ عَلَيْهِ ـ وَأَنَا هُوَ ـ أَلَمْ أَعْمَلْ فِيكُمْ بِالثَّقَلِ الأَكْبَرِ! وَأَتْرُكُ فِيكُمُ الثَّقَلَ الأَصْغَرَ! وَرَكَزْتُ فِيكُمْ رَايَةَ الإِيمَانِ، وَوَقَفْتُكُمْ عَلَى حُدُودِ الْحَلاَلِ وَالْحَرَامِ، وَأَلْبَسْتُكُمُ الْعَافِيَةَ مِنْ عَدْلِي، وَفَرَشْتُكُمْ

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[i] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 1.
[ii] *Ibid.*

المَعْرُوفَ مِنْ قَوْلِي وَفِعْلِي، وَأَرَيْتُكُمْ كَرَائِمَ الأَخْلاَقِ مِنْ نَفْسِي؟ فَلاَ تَسْتَعْمِلُوا الرَّأْيَ فِيمَا لاَ يُدْرِكُ قَعْرَهُ الْبَصَرُ، وَلاَ تَتَغَلْغَلُ إِلَيْهِ الْفِكَرُ

> O people, take this [teaching] from the Seal (ṣ) of the prophets that "truly he who dies from among us [i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt] is not dead, and he who decays from among us does not really decay." Do not speak of that which you do not understand, because most of the truth lies in what you deny. Accept the argument of one against whom you have no argument, and that is myself. Did I not act before you on the greater of the two weighty things [*al-thaqal al-akbar*; i.e., the Qur'ān] and did I not bequeath to you the lesser of the two [*al-thaqal al-asghar*; i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt]. I fixed among you the standard of faith, and I taught you the limits of the lawful and unlawful. I clothed you with [the garments of] safety with my justice and spread for you [the carpet of] virtue by my words and my deeds. I showed you the noble ethical virtues through myself. So do not exercise your opinion about the depths of that which the eyes cannot fathom and that which the mind cannot penetrate.[i]

The Imam (*ʿa*) begins by saying:

> O people, take this [teaching] from the Seal (ṣ) of the prophets ...

In other words, I relate this matter from the noblest Prophet (ṣ) who said:

> ... truly he who dies from among us [i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt] is not dead ...

Others have died and they are dead. We will also die but are [spiritually] alive.

> ... and he who decays from among us does not really decay ...

No one from amongst us will become old or decrepit even though he may seem old.

> ... Do not speak of that which you do not understand, because most of the truth lies in what you deny. Accept

[i] *Ibid.*, sermon 86 (87 in some versions).

> the argument of one against whom you have no argument, and that is myself ...

I have a proof against you while you do not have a proof against me. Let me be for I am the proof of God over you.

> ... Did I not act before you on the greater of the two weighty things [*al-thaqal al-akbar*; i.e., the Qur'ān] and did I not bequeath to you the smaller of the two [*al-thaqal al-asghar*; i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt] ...

Not only have I acted according to the *al-thaqal al-akbar* which is the Qur'ān but I have also respected the Progeny of the Prophet [i.e., *al-thaqal al-asghar*].

> ... I fixed among you the standard of faith ...

I fixed and centred the flag of religion amongst you.

> ... I taught you the limits of the lawful and unlawful. I clothed you with [the garments of] safety with my justice and spread for you [the carpet of] virtue by my words and my deeds. I showed you the noble ethical virtues through myself ...

During the entire course of my life I have acted in a noble fashion. You have seen ethical nobility [in me] so much so that my life has taught you how to become noble.

The same expression that the Prophet (ṣ) expressed, "I have been delegated [as a prophet] to perfect noble ethical traits," is repeated by Imam ʿAlī: I have shown you, in a practical manner, noble ethical virtues. The Imam ends off with the following:

> ... So do not exercise your opinion about the depths of that which the eyes cannot fathom and that which the mind cannot penetrate.

In Sermon 126, the Imam shows us that the nobility that God invites us to is nobility in the eyes of God not nobility in the eyes of man.

> أَتَأْمُرُونِّي أَنْ أَطْلُبَ النَّصْرَ بِالْجَوْرِ فِيمَنْ وَلِّيتُ عَلَيْهِ! وَاللهِ لاَ أَطُورُ بِهِ مَا سَمَرَ سَمِيرٌ وَمَا أَمَّ نَجْمٌ فِي السَّمَاءِ نَجْماً! لَوْ كَانَ الْمَالُ لِي لَسَوَّيْتُ بَيْنَهُمْ، فَكَيْفَ وَإِنَّمَا الْمَالُ مَالُ اللهِ ! أَلاَ وَإِنَّ إِعْطَاءَ الْمَالِ

فِي غَيْرِ حَقِّهِ تَبْذِيرٌ وَإِسْرَافٌ، وَهُوَ يَرْفَعُ صَاحِبَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَيَضَعُهُ فِي الاخِرَةِ، وَيُكْرِمُهُ فِي النَّاسِ وَيُهِينُهُ عِنْدَ اللهِ، وَلَمْ يَضَعِ امْرُؤٌ مَالَهُ فِي غَيْرِ حَقِّهِ وَعِنْدَ غَيْرِ أَهْلِهِ إِلاَّ حَرَمَهُ اللهُ شُكْرَهُمْ وَكَانَ لِغَيْرِهِ وُدُّهُمْ، فَإِنْ زَلَّتْ بِهِ النَّعْلُ يَوْماً فَاحْتَاجَ إِلَى مَعُونَتِهِمْ فَشَرُّ خَلِيلٍ وَأَلأَمُ خَدِينٍ

> Do you command me that I should seek support by oppressing those over whom I have been placed? By God, I will not do so as long as the world goes on, and as long as one star leads another in the sky. Even if it were my own property, I would have distributed it equally amongst them. Why, then, would I not do the same with the property of God? Beware, certainly, that giving of wealth without it being warranted is wastefulness and lavishness. It raises its doer in this world, but lowers him in the next world. It honours him before people, but disgraces him with God. If a man gives his property to those who have no right for it or do not deserve it, God deprives him of their gratefulness, and their love too would be for others. Then if he falls on bad days and needs their help, they would prove the worst of comrades and most ignoble of friends.[i]

The context of this sermon is as follows: it was suggested to Imam ᶜAlī that he should sometimes attempt to reach his goals through illicit ways (the idea that the "ends justify the means" has always been around). To this, the Imam responded incredulously: You advise me that I should attain my objective through that which is unlawful?!

> Do you command me that I should seek support by oppressing those over whom I have been placed? By God, I will not do so as long as the world goes on, and as long as one star leads another in the sky ...

These kinds of expressions are literary devices to signify the idea of continuation in Arabic literature. The Arabs would say that so long as the stars are in heaven and water is in the seas, a particular affair will continue to be. Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) also uses

[i] *Ibid.*, sermon 126.

these expressions in some of his sermons, which have been taken from Arabic literature, but they only carry a literary nuance.

However, when the time comes for Imam ᶜAlī to explain the true concept of "everlastingness", he does so in one of two ways: (1) Either he interweaves these literary devices with the name of God and mention of the Resurrection so as to compensate for their connotative deficiency; or (2) he coins new phrases based on Qur'ānic teachings and expressions such as "Until God inherits the earth and whosoever is on it"[1] where the idea of God and the return of all things to Him is conveyed. There is no mention of the succession of stars or of their appearing in the sky. In fact, in a deed of endowment that Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) wrote, it says: This must remain "until God inherits the earth and whosoever is on it."

In the sermon we are discussing, however, he uses the normal literary device by saying that so long as the stars rise in the horizon, he will never commit this deed [of oppression]. Then he says:

> ... Even if it were my own property, I would have distributed it equally amongst them. Why, then, would I not do the same with the property of God? ...

Paraphrased, he is saying the following: Are you suggesting to me that by bestowing unwarranted favours I should incline the hearts of some people to my government? This is not permissible. This wealth belongs to God and the collectivity of Muslims; it does not belong to me. And even if it *were* my wealth, I would still try to be just when distributing it.

Then he says:

> ... Beware, certainly, that giving of wealth without it being warranted is wastefulness and lavishness. It raises its doer in this world, but lowers him in the next world. It honours him before people, but disgraces him with God (ᶜ*ind Allah*).

[1] This expression appears in some of the *aḥādīth* attributed to Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) and is based on verse 19:40 of the Qur'ān: "Indeed, We shall inherit the earth and whoever there is on it". [Ed.]

In other words, you should try to seek nobility with God (*karāmah ʿind Allah*) not nobility with the people (*karāmah ʿind al-nās*). Of course, people may say that so and so is a great and noble man, but because this nobility is false, in realty, it is an insult and disgrace—i.e., the opposite of nobility is what becomes true.

In our previous discussions, we mentioned how you cannot have both nobility and disgrace invalidated at the same time. For every lie there is a truth, and for every allegory there is a reality. Imam ʿAlī says that if someone wishes to attain a position through unlawful means, then his so called 'nobility' is false. If nobility is falsified then it implies the truth of its opposite which is disgrace. Since it is not possible that nobility and disgrace both be invalidated, once nobility is falsified, disgrace becomes true.[i]

The Resurrection is a time when truth and reality will become evident. On that day, disgrace will become apparent. In the Qurʾān, God sometimes uses the following expressions: "In it he will abide in disgrace forever" (25:69) or "disgraceful punishment" (6:93/41:18/46:20) or other similar expressions. Therefore, if nobility is negated for someone, then disgrace will be affirmed for them.

Similarly, if honour is negated for someone, then shame is affirmed for them. The following appears in the Qurʾān:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّـهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِالْإِثْمِ ۚ فَحَسْبُهُ جَهَنَّمُ ۚ وَلَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ

And when he is told, 'Be wary of Allah,' conceit seizes him sinfully; so let Hell suffice him, and it is surely an evil resting place! (2:206)

When certain people are encouraged towards God-wariness, a false 'honour' overtakes them. They wish to become honourable through sin. Such an honour is a false honour. Once honour is negated for someone, then its opposite can be affirmed, which is shame. Put differently, if we make a claim regarding a particular individual that he or she is honourable, and if this claim is

[i] Refer to the narration mentioned in Session Seven: "If nobility does not become the basis for someone, then dishonour will." *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, vol. 5, p. 289, no. 8201. [Ed.]

falsified, then the opposite of what was predicated—i.e., his disgrace—will certainly be true. This disgrace of his will becomes apparent at the Resurrection, since that is a time when the truth reveals itself. Hence, God says that such people will be dishonoured on that day.

In this sermon, Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) is saying this: the bestowal of wealth unjustifiably may make a person noble in front of people but it will lead to disgrace, dishonour, and baseness with God.

The Imam continues the sermon:

> ... If a man gives his property to those who have no right for it or do not deserve it, God deprives him of their gratefulness, and their love too would be for others. Then if he falls on bad days and needs their help, they would prove the worst of comrades and most ignoble of friends.

If, someday, this man falls from his position and is in need of some help, those same people [who he previously bestowed wealth upon] will be the worst of friends and the most reprehensible of companions.

In Sermon 198, the Imam expounds on the greatness of God-wariness which is the grounds for nobility:

فَمَنْ أَخَذَ بِالتَّقْوَى عَزَبَتْ عَنْهُ الشَّدَائِدُ بَعْدَ دُنُوِّهَا، وَاحْلَوْلَتْ لَهُ الأُمُورُ بَعْدَ مَرَارَتِهَا، وَانْفَرَجَتْ عَنْهُ الأَمْوَاجُ بَعْدَ تَرَاكُمِهَا، وَأَسْهَلَتْ لَهُ الصِّعَابُ بَعْدَ إِنْصَابِهَا، وَهَطَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ الْكَرَامَةُ بَعْدَ قُحُوطِهَا

> Therefore, whoever holds onto God-wariness, troubles vanish from him after their nearness; affairs become sweet after their bitterness; waves [of troubles] recede from him after having flooded him; difficulties become easy for him after having wearied him; nobility pours down upon him after a period of famine.[1]

If a man is wary of God, the difficulties that approach him will vanish as quickly as they appear. This is an extremely subtle point which can help clarify the following noble verse:

وَمَن يَتَّقِ اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّهُ مَخْرَجًا

[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 198.

... And whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him.
(65:2)

The Imam is saying: When difficulties approach a God-wary man—one who is always wary of God even during trying times—those difficulties sink into oblivion.[i] They pack off and disappear from his sight. Of course, it is possible that at first they taste bitter; however, in so far as he is God-wary, they immediately become sweet for him. That bitterness will be replaced with this sweetness.

Moreover, formidable waves after brimming and flooding over him will recede and open up. Difficulties will become easy for him. After years of famine and drought, how pleasant and beneficial it is to have a downpour of rain? The Imam says that rains of nobility will pour down upon him despite there being no sign of it prior to.

Hence, as seen from this sermon, God-wariness plays such an important role in man's life that it is through it that the rains of nobility are showered on him.

In Sermon 214, the Imam describes God-wariness as a precursor to nobility:

فَلْيَقْبَلِ امْرُؤٌ كَرَامَةً بِقَبُولِهَا، وَلْيَحْذَرْ قَارِعَةً قَبْلَ حُلُولِهَا، وَلْيَنْظُرِ
امْرُؤٌ فِي قَصِيرِ أَيَّامِهِ، وَقَلِيلِ مُقَامِهِ

> Let man accept nobility by being receptive to it and let him fear the Hour of Judgement before its descent. Let man take note of the shortness of his days and the brevity of his sojourn.[ii]

Man must accept nobility and undertake God-wariness. In describing God-wariness and encouraging people towards it, the Imam tells people to accept God-wariness if they wish to reach nobility.

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[i] The term used in the sermon is from the verbal noun *ʿuzūb*. *ʿUzūb* means *ghurūb* (to depart, diminish or set). It appears in the Qurʾān such as in verse 10:61: "Not an atom's weight escapes (*yaʿzubu*) your Lord". It is also related to the verbal noun *ghaybah* (to be absent, hidden, or to be hidden) such that *ʿāzib* (forgotten) is *ghāʿib* (absent).

[ii] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 214. This section appears under the title: "An admonition to God-wariness."

In a lengthy letter that Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) sent to his son, Imam Ḥasan (ᶜa), the Imam says:

وَأَكْرِمْ نَفْسَكَ عَنْ كُلِّ دَنِيَّةٍ وَإِنْ سَاقَتْكَ إِلَى الرَّغَائِبِ، فَإِنَّكَ لَنْ تَعْتَاضَ بِمَا تَبْذُلُ مِنْ نَفْسِكَ عِوَضاً. وَلاَ تَكُنْ عَبْدَ غَيْرِكَ وَقَدْ جَعَلَكَ اللهُ حُرّاً. وَمَا خَيْرُ خَيْرٍ لاَ يُنَالُ إِلاَّ بِشَرٍّ، وَيُسْرٍ لاَ يُنَالُ إِلاَّ بِعُسْرٍ

> Ennoble your soul by abstaining from every base thing even when that thing ushers you towards what you desire for surely you will never achieve any compensation for that which you sacrifice from your own soul. Do not be the slave of other than you while God has created you free. There is no good in a good which can only be achieved through evil, and there is no good in an ease which can only be achieved through [disgracing] hardship.[i]

In the beginning of this passage, the Imam says:

> Ennoble your soul by abstaining from every base thing even when they usher you towards what you desire ...

In other words, consider your soul too noble for the petty things which, on the surface, pull you to that which you desire. But that pull to what you desire implies that your desire is false. If that which is desired is false, it implies that its undesirability is true.

The Imam then says:

> ... for surely you will never achieve any compensation for that which you sacrifice from your own soul ...

In your acceptance of this lowly thing, you have not received anything of value in exchange for that which you have given. That which you gave was nobility and the repute of your spirit; in compensation, nothing of value has come your way. In other words, in exchange for that which you sacrificed from your own self and that which you gave from part of your soul, you have been left without anything.

The Imam continues:

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[i] *Ibid.*, letter 31.

> ... Do not be the slave of other than you while God has created you free ...

Here the relation of nobility and [spiritual] freedom becomes clear. The noble man is a free man. The Imam says that God has created you a free man, so do not make yourself the slave of another. Desire [for the world] is something that is external to the true substance of your soul even though it has made a place for itself in the depths of your house. Sometimes, man frees himself from the shackles of another [i.e., his outer enemy] but says: "now I will do whatever I want." In this way, he becomes a slave of his inner enemy [i.e. his passions]. The Imam says: The enemy—whether inner or outer—is other than you and external [to your true nature].

Man is not indifferent to slavery and freedom whether from the ethical point of view—in terms of virtues and vices—or from the intellectual point of view. In terms of his world view, God has created man with an inner disposition towards monotheism, though in terms of his will, he is free. So freedom and slavery as well as knowledge and ignorance are not the same for man. Man has been created with an intellective disposition and the noble and free soul. Just as ignorance must not come in the way of his innate insight, his desire must also not come in the way of his intellective freedom.

Then the Imam says:

> ... There is no good in a good which can only be achieved through evil, and there is no good in an ease which can only be achieved through [disgracing] hardship.

In other words, that which is obtained through evil is not good; and that ease which is obtained through [degrading] difficulty is not true ease.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

Session Ten

A Reminder

Our discussion is about the nobility of man according to the noble Qur'ān. The necessary principles and preliminaries that shed light on our discussion are as follows:

What is intended by nobility here is nobility *with God* (*ʿind Allah*) and not nobility with the people (*ʿind al-nās*). This is the first principle. Moreover, nobility with God depends upon God-wariness and cannot be acquired without it.

Nobility depends upon God-wariness in its existence and non-existence, in its generation and perpetuation, and in its strength and weakness. The reason for this is because whenever one thing is dependent on another—where the dependence is of a natural and true type—then it implies that the dependent relies on the source in all the aforementioned properties.

The second principle is that nobility is a perfection of the soul. Now the soul will never become perfect in its various stages of action without knowledge. Moreover, knowledge alone will not assure that all of the various dimensions of man's persona are perfected. Now since nobility depends upon God-wariness, and since God-wariness is a perfection of the soul, and since every perfection of the soul is dependent on knowledge and action, therefore, God-wariness will depend upon wisdom [on the plane of knowledge] and righteous deeds [on the plane of action]. This particular dependence is similar to the dependence of nobility upon God-wariness in the aforementioned properties. In other words, God-wariness depends upon wisdom and righteous deeds in its existence and non-existence, generation and perpetuation, and strength and weakness. So if knowledge and righteous actions are strong then the level of God-wariness will also be strong and as a result, nobility will also become strong.

The third principle is that even though knowledge and righteous deeds are both necessary in the soul's acquisition of spiritual perfections, the two are not on the same footing. To explain, if action is the kind that stems from the heart and the soul then its relation with knowledge will be strong. But if it is action

relating to the body and the organs then it will never be equal to knowledge, for knowledge is associated with the heart not the body. Now since the body can never be at par with the heart, such actions [on the physical plane] can never be equal to knowledge.

Moreover, at certain stages in the development of the soul's perfection there is no talk of action. At that point there is only knowledge that is present, such as the station of witnessing [*shuhūd*]. In these lofty stations man only *sees* [the Truth] and there is no room for any action. Hence, it is possible that two people perform the same action but only one of them reaches the station of witnessing—purely on account of the depth of his understanding and sincerity. At that point there is no room for physical actions and man can only progress by means of knowledge and understanding.

Of course, action is the prerequisite for the onset of mystic witnessing. The proof for this matter is the fact that when God mentions the effects of knowledge and righteous deeds, He introduces one of them as the forerunner, leader, and guide and the other as the helper and assistant. He says:

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ

... to Him ascends the good word, and righteous conduct elevates it [i.e. the good word] ... (35:10)

Here, the "good word"—which refers to one's belief and knowledge—soars up to God, while righteous conduct acts as an aide and helps the good word rise upwards.[12] Although actions also ascend towards God (and are thus accepted by Him) they are certainly guided in their spiritual flight by knowledge and understanding. So the good word, in the verse above, refers to pure knowledge, correct belief, and complete understanding. Understanding rises towards the Truth and righteous deeds help it in its ascent upwards.

Hence, it is not the case that knowledge and righteous deeds are on equal footing. In so far as knowledge is tied to the heart and in so far as action depends on the parts of the body, it follows that knowledge and complete belief is essential while

action—even if it is righteous—is secondary. This is because the heart is essential and the parts of the body are secondary.

Based upon this preface we can conclude that the foundation of all action goes back to knowledge. To the degree that knowledge increases, righteous deeds will also become more perfect.

Wayfaring Knowledge: the Foundation of Nobility

The three principles mentioned above have led us to the conclusion that the basis of all the perfections of the soul is knowledge. We must now ask ourselves as to what kind of knowledge is the foundation for God-wariness and the resultant foundation for nobility. Is it acquired knowledge—i.e., forming conceptions and confirming them (*taṣawwur wa taṣdīq*)—that is the basis of God-wariness and the means through which nobility arises? Or rather, is it a particular type of knowledge that also seeks sincerity and which inevitably will lead to God-wariness and nobility? The elucidation of this matter will form the fourth principle in our discussion.

Knowledge based on conception and confirmation is not completely ineffectual in the advent of faith and the acquisition of God-wariness and righteous deeds. However, at times, this same knowledge—when it is devoid of God-wariness and righteous deeds—can pave the way for the destruction of man. Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) says:

رُبَّ عَالِمٍ قَدْ قَتَلَهُ جَهْلُه

How many scholars there are whose very ignorance has certainly killed them![1]

In other words, how many ostensibly "educated" people have been ruined by their own ignorance. Elsewhere, he says:

لاَ تَجْعَلُوا عِلْمَكُمْ جَهْلاً وَ يَقِينَكُمْ شَكًّا إِذَا عَلِمْتُمْ فَاعْمَلُوا وَ إِذَا تَيَقَّنْتُمْ فَأَقْدِمُوا

Do not transform your knowledge into ignorance nor your certainty into doubt. Once you have understood then act

[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, saying 104.

[upon your knowledge], and once you have certainty then embark upon it.[1]

Hence, from these words of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa), it is clear that the knowledge which leads to all the virtues is not necessarily knowledge based on conception, confirmation, and the like. Incidentally, these types of knowledge do not pave the way for righteous actions [at times, in fact, they can be detrimental to them]. However, the knowledge which will definitely soar towards the Truth and which is helped in this flight by righteous deeds is an altogether different type of knowledge. It is a knowledge upon which the Qurʾān places much emphasis and which it introduces as a knowledge mingled with love (*maḥabbah*).

The Qurʾān tells us: You should make love the basis of your works. In other words, you should acquire that knowledge wherein that which you know (*maʿlūm*) is that which you love (*maḥbūb*). Do not fall in love with knowledge itself; rather, attach your heart to the Known [i.e., God]. Sometimes man gets so preoccupied with knowledge that he exerts all his energy in its pursuit. However, the amount of effort that he expends in his studies and academic pursuits pales in comparison to the time he spends in offering his prayers on time or praying with sincerity. Such an individual is infatuated with knowledge (*ʿilm*) not the known (*maʿlūm*). In reality, since he loves himself and since this knowledge has given him some standing [in society], he becomes attached to this knowledge as well. Such knowledge does not prepare the grounds for God-wariness; as a result, it will not become the source and foundation of nobility either.

So, in order to determine whether or not our knowledge will cause us to soar towards the Truth and obtain God-wariness and nobility, we should find out whether it is knowledge that we love or whether it is the known.

For example, in our theological debates and discussions, have we attached our hearts to this knowledge and these mental deliberations or have we become fond of the subject of our discussion—i.e., God Almighty? If we have become obsessed with

[1] *Ibid.*, saying 266.

the knowledge itself then it is clear that we seek the provision of this world. If, however, the field of study on its own does not become the target of our love—rather, we love the Known and hence our love of the knowledge is because of our love for the Known—then we can expect that this knowledge will lead to righteous deeds. Subsequently, due to the repetition and study of these deeds, the disposition or faculty (*malakah*) of God-wariness will emerge within us and this, in turn, will lead to the emergence of the disposition of nobility.

The reason why we say that the "habit" of God-wariness will bring in its wake the "disposition" of nobility is because nobility is a quality of the soul and hence is a disposition. It is dependent on God-wariness, which itself is a quality of the soul and hence a disposition as well. It is not possible for a quality of the soul which is in the form of a disposition to be achieved through a passing state (*ḥāl*). In other words, it is impossible for something which has not yet become a disposition of the soul to pave the way for a different disposition of the soul. This is because according to the first two principles mentioned at the beginning of this session, nobility depends upon God-wariness in its existence and non-existence and its generation and corruption while God-wariness depends upon knowledge and righteous deeds. Since nobility and God-wariness are qualities of the soul and since the qualities of the soul are dispositions of the soul, such habits cannot be based on momentary actions. It is impossible that something which is momentary and which has not become a disposition—which in technical terms is called a 'state' and not a 'disposition—become the grounds for the onset of another disposition. This is because dispositions (*malakāt*) are interconnected with one another just as the states (*aḥwāl*) are also interconnected.

If knowledge and righteous deeds are simply temporary states of the wayfarer and they have yet to become second nature to him then they will only be able to bring about a God-wariness that is, like them, a passing state (not one that is a disposition for the wayfarer). Now a God-wariness that is of a passing nature and has yet to become a disposition in the soul will be followed by nobility that is, like it, of a passing nature; it will not lead to a nobility that is firmly rooted in the soul of the

wayfarer. Since the foundation is impermanent, the edifice which rests upon it will also be transient. Momentary knowledge and actions will only lead to a transient form of God-wariness and nobility.

Love: the Steady Mount of the Wayfarer

The topic at hand involves self-examination—we must evaluate whether the way we pursue knowledge can lay the grounds for God-wariness or not. Those who have traversed this path before have reminded us that according to the noble Qur'ān God-wariness is the provision for the road.

وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ

... and take provision, for indeed the best provision is God-wariness ... (2:197)

But aside from having a provision for his journey, the wayfarer on the path to God also has a steed upon which he rides. That steed is love (*maḥabbah*). The man who is mounted upon the steed of love takes aide from the provision of God-wariness. It is true that God-wariness is man's provision [for his journey] but the Qur'ān has never said that the task will be achieved through God-wariness alone. In truth, God-wariness lies in the middle of the path and God would never invite us to stop half way on the path. Rather, what He says is this: God-wariness is a provision. One must secure this provision as well as a mount, a guide, and a [determined] path. A traveller will never reach his destination only by having a provision. If there is no path, or if he does not have a guide, a companion, or a mount then he will never be able to reach his journey's end.

It is said that your companions on this journey are the prophets and the saints (*awliyā'*). Endeavour to travel with such companions. It is obvious that the wayfaring man must seek a travelling companion. The way to do this is for man to become worthy of travelling on the road towards nobility so that they [i.e. the prophets and saints] may accept him as a companion (*rafiq*) on the road:

وَمَن يُطِعِ اللَّـهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَـٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّـهُ عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ ۚ وَحَسُنَ أُولَـٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا

Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle—they are with those whom Allah has blessed, including the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous; How beautiful is their companionship! (4:69)

The prophets, the righteous, the truthful, and the martyrs are excellent traveling companions.

To summarize then, at one place the Qur'ān says, "take provision, for indeed the best provision is God-wariness" (2:197), and in another, it instructs us to find good travelling companions and to travel alongside them. In fact, the prophets, the saints, and the Imams (ᶜa) are also the guides along the path. The road itself is the "straight path of religion" (*ṣirāṭ-e mustaqīm-e dīn*). The provision is already clear apparent [i.e., God-wariness]. As for the steed, those who are traversing this path have told us that the steed of this journey is love. In other words, fondness towards God and the divine saints is the mount upon which we embark on this path.

In the "Whispered Prayer of the Lovers," Imam Sajjād (ᶜa) says: "O God ... I ask from You love for You, love for those (such as the saints) who love You, love for every (righteous) act which will join me to You nearness ..."[i] This "love" is the very steed [that will carry the wayfarer through his journey].

The Unity of the Wayfarer and the Way (Ittiḥād-e sālik wa maslak)[13]

When an intelligible idea is likened to a physical phenomenon, the likeness is not with regards to all aspects. Hence, when they say that the path, the mount, the travelling companion, and the provision are all necessary in any journey, this does not mean that these necessities are separate from one another in spiritual journeys as they are separate in physical ones. In fact,

[i] "Whispered Prayer No. 9" in *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*.

with regards to the guide and the way, God has said one and the same thing. With regards to the guide, God says:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ

In the Apostle of Allah there is certainly for you a good exemplar ... *(33:21)*

As for the way, God says that the conduct of the Prophet—man's guide—is man's path.

يس وَالْقُرْآنِ الْحَكِيمِ إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

YaSin! By the Wise Qur'an, you are indeed one of the apostles, on a straight path. (36:1-4)

In other words, you are the essence of the straight path (*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*).

The straight path is not a physical road that the wayfarer must traverse. Rather, beliefs, ethical qualities, and deeds are what compose the straight path and these, of course, are never separate from man's soul. The Perfect Man who has these beliefs, ethical qualities, and deeds is the embodiment of the Path. Hence, when we find it mentioned in the traditions that the Ahl al-Bayt (*ᶜa*) are the "straight path" or the "criteria of acts" (*mīzān al-aᶜmāl*) or the "measure of justice" (*mīzān al-qisṭ*), we should know that such statements speak to this reality—i.e., they are, themselves, both the guides and the path.

The same is the case for the mount and the provision. Even though the Qurʾān has mentioned that the provision is God-wariness and even though the wayfarers who have traversed this path have stated that the mount is love, but on careful examination, we see that this provision of God-wariness fulfils many functions: it nurtures the wayfarer; it strengthens the mount; it smoothens the road; it increases one's companions; and it also brings us closer to our guide. Therefore, in some of the sayings of Imam ᶜAlī (*ᶜa*) we find that God-wariness has been described as a good mount.[i] This does not contradict the

[i] "Know that truly God-wariness is like trained horses..." *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 16.

words of those people who are traversing on this path and who have said that the mount that carries us is love. This is because on the one hand, God-wariness is a means that brings about love, and on the other hand, God-wariness is the very product of love. In other words, each level of God-wariness lays the ground for a level of love; and each higher form of love lays the ground for a higher level of God-wariness. So every level of the multiple levels of love brings about a level of the multiple levels of God-wariness.

Love is both a mount on the path as well as that which increases the provision of God-wariness. Hence, it is not like the mounts of this world which only utilize and consume their provisions; rather, it is a mount that strengthens both the rider as well as the provision itself.

Knowledge as an Instance of Ignorance

In light of what has been said, it should be clear now that the knowledge and wisdom that is the foundation of all these perfections is not discursive knowledge or the process of conception and confirmation or any other form of knowledge. These forms of knowledge are indeed preliminaries but they are not essential. The sign that they are not essential is the fact that they can be divorced from righteous action in so far as one may have [acquired] knowledge yet be lacking in righteous deeds. Hence, this particular form of knowledge cannot be the foundation of God-wariness. Such a form of knowledge is, in reality, ignorance—albeit, the "ignorance" that stands opposed to the intellect—even though it is at the same time "knowledge"—i.e., the "knowledge" that stands opposed to ignorance.[14] Stated differently, if we consider ignorance in its relation to knowledge then this form of awareness is knowledge [and not ignorance]. But if we consider ignorance in relation to the intellect then this form of awareness is truly ignorance and not intelligence.

Therefore, that knowledge and wisdom [that we are concerned with] which is the grounds for all subsequent perfections is a type of knowledge and wisdom that transforms that which is known into that which is loved by the knower. As a result, man attaches his heart to the object of his knowledge

and not to his knowledge itself; loves the object of his recognition and not his recognition itself; and submits to that reality that he has understood not his understanding itself. But when someone gets too preoccupied with knowledge and wisdom, in reality he seeks himself and not that which he has come to know or understand. If, however, he becomes intimate with what he knows and recognizes, it is clear that he seeks God. It is this form of knowledge that lays the foundation for nobility.

As a reminder, in the preceding discussions, it was mentioned that from the Qur'ānic point of view, God-wariness has many dimensions and degrees. After God mentions the righteous deeds, He says that they are the grounds for God-wariness.[i] Elsewhere, in explaining the monotheistic world-view, He instructs us to present these matters in order to become God-wary [ii] and from this, it becomes clear that knowledge and understanding are also the grounds for God-wariness.

In other words, in the same way that God says the following about fasting:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

Fasting has been prescribed for you as it had been for the people before you so that you may become God-wary. (2:183)

He also says regarding those who have a monotheistic world view:

إِنَّ فِي اخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّـهُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَّقُونَ

Indeed in the alternation of night and day, and whatever Allah has created in the heavens and the earth, there are surely signs for a people who are God-wary. (10:6)

Those who have intellective God-consciousness try to view the world as a particular manifestation of God.

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[i] A reference to the Qur'ānic verse 2:183 discussed in Session 8.
[ii] A reference to the Qur'ānic verse 10:6 discussed in Session 9.

To summarize, then, God-wariness can be found within the domains of both righteous deeds and knowledge—of course, the knowledge that we speak of is the one that can transform that which is known into the beloved of man.

The Characteristics of Academic Knowledge

It should become clear from our discussions that the knowledge which becomes man's beloved itself—as opposed to that knowledge which paves the way for understanding the True Beloved—is one which did not exist at one time in the past and will cease to exist at one time in the future. Such knowledge cannot be trusted. God warns man regarding these forms of knowledge—i.e., those which are viewed as independent and not as means for the love of the known—that such forms of knowledge are surrounded by two types of non-existence. To explain, there was a time in the past when you were not in a position to understand these classes, discussions, book, speeches, etc. [that you take for granted now]. The same will occur again—whether in the near or distant future—where they will be outside your grasp once more.

On the one hand, the Qur'ān says:

وَاللَّـهُ أَخْرَجَكُم مِّن بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا

Allah has brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything ... (16:78)

The day that you came into the world, you did not have any of this knowledge. The verse continues:

وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۙ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

... He made for you hearing, eyesight, and hearts so that you may give thanks. (16:78)

So this type of formal education was preceded by ignorance.

On the other hand, those who have reached old age have forgotten [nearly] everything that they had formally studied.

وَمِنكُم مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْ لَا يَعْلَمَ بَعْدَ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا

... And there are some among you who are relegated to the nethermost age so that he knows nothing after [having possessed] some knowledge. (16:70)

In fact, this particular phrase from the noble verse has been repeated twice in the Qur'ān (the two phrases differ only in so far as there is an added preposition *min* in 22:5 which is not found in the above-mentioned verse).[15] In other words, if someone becomes aged and decrepit, it is rare that he should be able to preserve his academic intelligence. Often, he usually forgets all the terminologies and expressions [that he may have learned in his youth].

Therefore, this knowledge for which there is so much commotion [in our day and age] is both preceded by and followed by non-existence. But man cannot travel towards the Hereafter with this kind of knowledge because even before he enters that world, he will lose this type of understanding.[16] Hence, this knowledge does not have the capability to soar towards God and is not what is referred to in the verse:

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ

... To Him ascends the good word... (35:10)

In fact, this knowledge does not even accompany man to the intermediary or imaginal world (*ʿālam-e barzakh*).

Such knowledge, then, is only an introductory means and a preliminary cure. Such preliminary cures are only used in order to transform the Known into man's beloved. If what man knows becomes his beloved then that knowledge is true knowledge and the "good word"—i.e., it will be protected from the tribulations of time and become a true referent of: "To Him ascends the good word, and righteous conduct elevates it [i.e. the good word]." (35:10)

Some Words from the Nahj al-Balāghah

We now present some words of the Leader of the Faithful (*ʿa*) from the honourable book, the *Nahj al-balāghah*, so that the effects of nobility—which is based on God-wariness—become clear in various matters. We also wish to show that God-wariness, which is the provision for the road, is also a competent mount as well—there being no contradiction in this.

In Sermon 16, the Imam says:

أَلاَ وَإِنَّ التَّقْوَى مَطَايَا ذُلُلٌ، حُمِلَ عَلَيْهَا أَهْلُهَا، وَأُعْطُوا أَزِمَّتَهَا، فَأَوْرَدَتْهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ.

Know that truly God-wariness is like trained horses on whom riders have been placed with the reins in their hands, so that they may take these riders to heaven.[1]

In other words, God-wariness is a tame and disciplined steed. It is a steady steed. All you need to do is mount it and [it will direct you since] it knows the way. It is competent and already trained. Hence, you do not need to tug its reins for it will take you straight to heaven on its own. These gentle steeds do not drop off their riders half way through the journey; rather, they take them all the way to the destination that is Paradise.

Even in difficult and troubling times, these trained and competent mounts will ensure that their riders reach heaven without being harmed on the way. This does not mean that the road itself is smooth and flat; rather, it is the mount which, because of its competence, makes the journey smooth. As for the road, in reality, it is a steep and distressing incline.

The noble Qur'ān tells the believers that the sinners always walk on flat plateaus; it asks [rhetorically] why they never travel in the mountain passes. From this, it can be deduced that the path of sin is an open and smooth road whereas the path of obedience to God is one with difficult peaks.

فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ فَكُّ رَقَبَةٍ أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ أَوْ مِسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ

[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 16.

Yet he has not embarked upon the uphill task. And what will show you what is the uphill task? [It is] the freeing of a slave, or feeding [the needy] on a day of starvation, or an orphan among relatives, or a needy man in desolation. (90:11-16)

Attempting to follow these directives is an uphill task. It is like a steep incline or mountain pass. Why do people not cross these mountainous peaks?

Hence, the road itself is not flat; rather, the mount [of God-wariness] knows the terrain and knows how to traverse it.

In Sermon 116, which is about the caliphate, Imam ʿAlī says:

فَلاَ أَمْوَالَ بَذَلْتموهَا لِلَّذِي رَزَقَهَا، وَلاَ أَنْفُسَ خَاطَرْتُمْ بِهَا لِلَّذِي خَلَقَهَا، تَكْرُمُونَ بِاللهِ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ، وَلاَ تُكْرِمُونَ اللهَ فِي عِبَادِهِ

You spend no wealth in the path of He who gave it [to you] nor do you risk your lives for the sake of He who created them. You enjoy honour and nobility through God amongst His creatures, but you do not honour God amongst His creatures.[1]

In other words, you have not given riches in the way of God nor have you put your life in danger for God's sake. You have gained your reputation through Islam but you are not ready to protect Islam's reputation. The respect and nobility that you have been endowed with is through the blessings of Islam and God; therefore, strive to give Islam honour and respect amongst the people.

In Sermon 122, regarding martyrdom and warfare in God's path—which, in reality, is God-wariness on the political and military plane—the Imam says:

وَأَيُّ امْرِىءٍ مِنْكُمْ أَحَسَّ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ رَبَاطَةَ جَأْشٍ عِنْدَ اللِّقَاءِ، وَرَأَى مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنْ إِخْوَانِهِ فَشَلاً، فَلْيَذُبَّ عَنْ أَخِيهِ بِفَضْلِ نَجْدَتِهِ الَّتِي فُضِّلَ بِهَا عَلَيْهِ كَمَا يَذُبُّ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ، فَلَوْ شَاءَ اللهُ لَجَعَلَهُ مِثْلَهُ. إِنَّ الْمَوْتَ طَالِبٌ حَثِيثٌ لاَيَفُوتُهُ الْمُقِيمُ، وَلاَ يُعْجِزُهُ الْهَارِبُ. إِنَّ أَكْرَمَ

[1] *Ibid.*, sermon 116 (117 in some versions).

الْمَوْتِ الْقَتْلُ! وَالَّذِي نَفْسُ ابْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ بِيَدِهِ، لأَلْفُ ضَرْبَةٍ بِالسَّيْفِ أَهْوَنُ مِنْ مِيتَةٍ عَلَى الْفِرَاشِ فِي غَيْرِ طَاعَةِ اللهِ وَكَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَيْكُمْ تَكِشُّونَ كَشِيشَ الضِّبَابِ: لاَ تَأْخُذُونَ حَقًّا، وَلاَ تَمْنَعُونَ ضَيْماً. قَدْ خُلِّيتُمْ وَالطَّرِيقَ، فَالنَّجَاةُ لِلْمُقْتَحِمِ، وَالْهَلَكَةُ لِلْمُتَلَوِّمِ

> Whoever among you feels in himself unswerving courage during the confrontation [with the enemies] and finds any of his comrades feeling disheartened should ward off [the enemies] from him [i.e., his comrade] just as he would do from himself, because of the superiority [in courage] he enjoys over the other, for if God had willed He would have made the former also like him. Certainly death is a quick seeker [of its next victim]. Neither does the steadfast escape it nor can the runner-away defy it. The noblest death is to be killed. By Him, in whose hand lies the life of the son of Abū Ṭālib, certainly a thousand strikings of the sword on me are easier to me than a death in bed which is not in obedience to God.
> It is as if I see you uttering voices like the recoiling sound of lizards! You do not seek to claim your own rights nor do you defend [others] against oppression. You have been let free on the path. Therefore, salvation is for the one who leaps to the task [of battle] while destruction is for him who reproaches [himself and others from fighting].[1]

The Imam begins with these words:

> Whoever among you feels in himself unswerving courage during the confrontation [with the enemies] and finds any of his comrades feeling disheartened should ward off [the enemies] from him [i.e., his comrade] just as he would do from himself, because of the superiority he enjoys ...

The blessing of courage and fearlessness has not been equally distributed to all. If someone has the temperament to combat, which may be absent in another, let him strive and make the most of this God-given fearlessness and bravery in the service

[1] *Ibid.*, sermon 122 (123 in some versions).

of protecting others. Just as he protects himself, let him protect others.

The Imam continues:

> ... Certainly death is a quick seeker [of its next victim]. Neither does the steadfast escape it nor can the runner-away defy it ...

Death is a quick and swift seeker. With speed and stealth, it searches and finds the man [whose time has come]. No one can be saved from the clutches of death. The noblest of deaths is death on the path of God. As the Imam says:

> ... The noblest death is to be killed ...

This "noblest death" is the fate of the one who is "the noblest of you with Allah" (49:13). Hence, martyrdom in the way of the Truth, defending the religion, and the likes are all part of political and military God-wariness which paves the way for political nobility. The Imam then says:

> ... By Him, in whose hand lies the life of the son of Abū Ṭālib, certainly a thousand strikings of the sword on me are easier to me than a death in bed which is not in obedience to God.

He then adds:[i]

> It is as if I see you uttering voices like the recoiling sound of lizards! You do not seek to claim your own rights nor do you defend [others] against oppression. You have been let free on the path. Therefore, salvation is for the one who leaps to the task [of battle] while destruction is for he who reproaches [himself and others from fighting].

The Imam is saying: I swear by Him in whose hands lies my soul that bearing a thousand swords on the path of God is easier for me than dying in a comfortable bed without obedience to God. But it is as if I see a day wherein you do not show any resistance in the face of foreign influences. Like lizards, you whimper in the face of danger. You let loose the cry of subjugation. But the way is open for you. He who rises to the occasion

[i] *Ibid.*, sermon 123. In some versions, it is appended to sermon 122.

and takes himself to the battlefield has been saved. He who sits at home has only thrown himself into destruction:

وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ

... and do not cast yourselves with your own hands into destruction... (2:195)

Such an outlook [of the Imam] differs vastly from the person who says not to go to war. The recluse who sits in his home has handed himself over to destruction. Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) says that he who hastens in defence of the nation of Islam will be saved but he who stands at the side and reprimands the warrior [from fighting] will be afflicted with destruction.

In Sermon 130, the Imam says the following when he went to see Abū Dharr off, who had been sentenced to exile:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرَضِينَ كَانَتَا عَلَى عَبْدٍ رَتْقاً، ثُمَّ اتَّقَى اللهَ، لَجَعَلَ اللهُ لَهُ مِنْهُمَا مَخْرَجاً

O Abū Dharr ... If the skies and the earth were to close upon a servant, but he was wary of God, God would open for him an outlet through them.[1]

In other words, if all the roads to sustenance and liberation become sealed off for man, and there is no way left for his escape, but he is of the God-wary, then "God would open for him an outlet through them."

In Sermon 139, with regards to the council [set up by second caliph] to determine the next caliph, the Imam says:

لَنْ يَسْبِقَ أَحَدٌ قَبْلِي إِلَى دَعْوَةِ حَقٍّ، وَصِلَةِ رَحِمٍ، وَعَائِدَةِ كَرَمٍ

No one has preceded me in inviting people to the Truth, in restoring kinship, and in returning to nobility.

To paraphrase the Imam: That which I have done was to prepare for the return of nobility. I am worthy of the caliphate since no one has invited others to the Truth or restored kinship or re-

[1] *Ibid.*, sermon 130.

established nobility as I have done. "Returning to nobility" refers to the fact that it is nobility that is returned to you as a result of following us [the Ahl al-Bayt] for we make you noble.

In Letter 31, which the Imam wrote for his son Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī (ʿa), he says:

وَإِنِ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَلاَّ يَكُونَ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ اللهِ ذُو نِعْمَةٍ فَافْعَلْ، فَإِنَّكَ مُدْرِكٌ قَسْمَكَ، وَآخِذٌ سَهْمَكَ، وَإِنَّ الْيَسِيرَ مِنَ اللهِ سُبْحَانَهُ أَعْظَمُ وَأَكْرَمُ مِنَ الْكَثِيرِ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ وَإِنْ كَانَ كُلٌّ مِنْهُ.

> If you can manage to avoid having a wealthy intermediary between yourself and Allah, do so, because [regardless] you will find your allotment and obtain your share. A little received directly from Allah, the Glorified, is far greater and more noble [*akram*] than that which is more but is received through His creatures, though everything is [really] from Allah.[1]

The Imam is saying: O my son! If you have the means available then strengthen your honourable soul by not depending on others in your daily bread. Do not say that though God is the provider it must come through certain means [i.e., people] because God is the provider even if there are no means. When it is said [in Islam] that a means is necessary, what it really implies is that man's own efforts are the means and not that other people are the means. Hence, do not covet what is in the hands and pockets of others.

Even though that which reaches you through the medium of others is also from God, in reality, it carries no nobility. The "sustenance" that you get through others is sealed—it is not an ennobling sustenance. So strive to acquire an ennobling sustenance. The little sustenance that you get without intermediaries is greater and far nobler than a large portion of sustenance that you get through others. Of course, in the end, whether it is through someone or not, it is all from God.

In his instructions to Mālik al-Ashtar, with regards to choosing the executive officers in the government, the Imam instructs

[1] *Ibid.*, letter 31.

Mālik to establish the government based on nobility and to choose noble employees. He says:

ثُمَّ انْظُرْ فِي أُمُورِ عُمَّالِكَ، فَاسْتَعْمِلْهُمُ اخْتِبَاراً، وَلاَ تُوَلِّهِمْ مُحَابَاةً وَأَثَرَةً، فَإِنَّهُمَا جِمَاعٌ مِنْ شُعَبِ الْجَوْرِ وَالْخِيَانَةِ. وَتَوَخَّ مِنْهُمْ أَهْلَ التَّجْرِبَةِ وَالْحَيَاءِ، مِنْ أَهْلِ الْبُيُوتَاتِ الصَّالِحَةِ، وَالْقَدَمِ فِي الإِسْلاَمِ الْمُتَقَدِّمَةِ، فَإِنَّهُمْ أَكْرَمُ أَخْلاَقاً

> Thereafter, look into the affairs of your executives. Seek their services only after having tested them. Do not appoint them based on favouritism or self-interests, because these things constitute sources of tyranny and treachery. Select from among them those who are people of experience and modesty, hailing from righteous families, having been well-versed in Islam. For surely, such persons are the most noble in virtue.[1]

In other words, if you want to employ an individual then first test him. If you find him to be competent, assign the task to him. Without testing a person and only based on one's preference—whether it be out of stubbornness, despotism, or expediency—do not appoint someone to a position. Only lean towards those workers who have some experience in religious matters and who are in touch with these virtues. If you do this, the government will be an ennobling one.

To conclude, we wish to end with a piece of advice, which is from the maxims of the Imam and which is related to both the topic at hand as well as something that speaks to the manner of how to eulogize God and supplicate to Him. It is a good instruction to act on. The advice is this: Each time we wish to seek something from God, we should combine our supplication with benedictions on the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa). In Saying 353, the Imam says:

إِذَا كَانَتْ لَكَ إِلَى اللهِ سُبْحَانَهُ حَاجَةٌ فَابْدَأْ بِمَسْأَلَةِ الصَّلاَةِ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وآله ، ثُمَّ سَلْ حَاجَتَكَ، فَإِنَّ اللهَ أَكْرَمُ مِنْ أَنْ يُسْأَلَ حَاجَتَيْنِ فَيَقْضِيَ إِحْدَاهُمَا وَيَمْنَعَ الأُخْرَى

[1] *Ibid.*, letter 53.

> If you have a need from Allah, the Glorified, then begin by seeking Allah's blessing on His messenger (may Allah bless him and his descendants) and then ask for your need. For surely, Allah is far too noble (*akram*) to have two requests made to Him while He accepts only one of them [i.e., the benedictions] and denies the other [i.e., the need].[i]

So if you have a wish and you want something from God, first send salutations upon the infallible Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) and only then present your request. This is because God will certainly accept salutations on them. Moreover, by the grace of those salutations, He will also grant you your wish. For God is nobler than that you should ask Him for two things and He grant you only one of them and deny you the other.

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

[i] *Ibid.*, saying 353 (361 in some versions).

Session Eleven

A Reminder

Our discussion was about the nobility of man according to the noble Qur'ān. It has become clear now that since nobility depends upon God-wariness, it will follow God-wariness in its very existence and non-existence, its generation and perpetuation, and its strength and weakness. The principle behind this relationship is that whenever one thing depends upon another, it does so in all the above-mentioned aspects.

It was also explained that God-wariness cannot come into existence without knowledge and righteous action. This is because God-wariness is a perfection of the soul. Now, the soul will only become perfect when it gains necessary awareness in intellectual matters and acquires healthy inclinations in practical affairs.

It was also mentioned as a preliminary and a principle that knowledge and action are not on the same footing; hence, the relationship of nobility to intellective God-consciousness (*taqwāye ʿilmī*) is not the same as its relation to practical God-wariness (*taqwāye ʿamalī*). In truth, knowledge is principal and action is subsidiary. To the extent that knowledge increases, action will become more sincere; as a result, God-wariness will become more powerful. Then, under the auspices of the strength and intensity of God-wariness, nobility will also become grander. The possibility of there being a similarity between the acts of the saints (*awliyā'*) of God and those of others pertains only to the form of these acts; what differentiates the two, however, is knowledge itself and by extension sincerity.

That which will be explained in this session is the following: When God mentions a certain attribute [or virtue] of the God-wary He has, in reality, ennobled them and hence, has actually stated the virtues of the noble. Moreover, there is nothing like knowledge and understanding which can pave the way for God-consciousness [and hence nobility]. Though they do not

stand as a sufficient cause, the influence of knowledge and understanding in the emergence of God-consciousness is more so than any other affair.

Knowledge and God-consciousness

In the noble Qur'ān, God says:

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ ۖ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّـهُ

... Be wary of Allah and Allah shall teach you... (2:282)

It is true that God did not say, "If you are wary of Allah, then He will teach you" [in a conditional sentence] like the verse in Surah Anfāl, wherein He says:

إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ يَجْعَل لَّكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you (8:29)

Nonetheless, in this verse [2:282] in so far as God's instruction has been conjoined [through the use of "and"] to the command of being God-wary, it becomes clear that there is direct relationship between God-wariness and learning the divine sciences.

Now, if God were to teach man a form of knowledge then that knowledge would not be cluttered with error [*jahl*, lit: "ignorance"] nor would it be separated from action. To explain, error sometimes finds its way into the preliminaries of certain sciences. Also, there are certain parts of some sciences that do not necessarily call for righteous acts. However, when it is God who bestows knowledge on an individual, neither does error or illusion find their way into the preliminaries of that knowledge, nor can this knowledge be separated from action.

Moreover, if God should accept someone as his apprentice, it is clear that such an individual will partake in divine nobility; similarly, if God should withhold His knowledge from a person, it is clear that such an individual will not partake of nobility in the sight of God. This is captured beautifully in the enlightening saying of the Leader of the Faithful (*ʿa*):

إذا أرْذَلَ الله عَبْداً حَظَرَ عَلَيْهِ العِلْمَ

If God wishes to dishonour someone then He denies him knowledge.[i]

In other words, if someone is considered an ignoble individual in the presence of God then God will deny him the opportunity to gain knowledge. As a result, he will find no pleasure in studying, reading, attending classes, or scholarly discussions. Instead, he will be content with the amount of information he has accumulated thus far. Of course, he will forget even this small amount in the near future.[ii]

This is a warning for us: If, at any point, we become indifferent to learning then we should realize that we are devoid of nobility in the sight of God. God will deprive someone of nobility who has deprived himself of God-wariness. It is impossible for someone to have taken strides on the path of God-wariness and God *not* ennoble him. Similarly, it is impossible that someone partake in divine nobility and God not open the doors of knowledge for him.

It is upon this basis that Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) has told us to strive to make our souls practice God-wariness. This is because the way to reach nobility is through God-wariness. Now since God-wariness is a disposition of the soul (*malakah nafsānī*) it cannot come about without practice. Moreover, in so far as the habits of the soul rest on the two wings of knowledge and action, we must continually practice when it comes to learning true knowledge and we must continually endeavour when it comes to acquiring righteous deeds.

For this reason, Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) says in his letter to ᶜUthmān ibn Ḥunayf Anṣārī:

وَإِنَّمَا هِيَ نَفْسِي أُرَوِّضُهَا بِالتَّقْوَى

Truly this is my soul that I have trained with God-wariness.[iii]

The Imam trains his soul with God-wariness so that the disposition of God-wariness is achieved. Thereafter, abstaining from

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[i] *Nahj al-balāghah*, saying 280.
[ii] A reference to the Qur'ānic verses 16:70 and 22:5 as discussed in the previous session.
[iii] *Nahj al-balāghah*, letter 45.

sin becomes effortless. When virtues become firmly rooted in the soul then good deeds are easily accomplished. In fact, God has promised such ease to the God-wary:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَىٰ وَاتَّقَىٰ وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ

As for him who gives and is God-wary and confirms the best promise, We shall surely facilitate him into a state of ease. (92:5-7)

In other words, We will make easy for him a good end. Initially, it is difficult but ultimately there is only ease.

Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) confirms this in the very next phrase of the above-mentioned letter. After speaking of how he trains his soul with God-wariness, the Imam continues:

لِتَأْتِيَ آمِنَةً يَوْمَ الْخَوْفِ الأَكْبَرِ

... so that it [i.e., his soul] gains safety on the day of the greatest fear [i.e., the Resurrection].[1]

In other words, he trains his soul so that on the day of the greatest fear, his soul may be secure. After all, God has promised security to the God-wary.

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي مَقَامٍ أَمِينٍ

Indeed the God-wary will be in a secure place. (44:51)

This is a secure place that is safe from every misfortune. So the Imam is saying that he trains himself with God-wariness so that his soul finds refuge in a safe place on the day of the greatest fear.

The Levels of God-wariness and Nobility

In the same way that God-wariness, which is the precursor to nobility, is composed of levels (much like worship), so too is the case for nobility itself. Since God-wariness is a dimension of the dimensions of devotion, it is like worship in so far as it can be due to the fear of hellfire, the desire for Paradise, or the love for God. Since nobility is dependent on God-wariness, it also

[1] *Ibid.*

carries these levels. The nobility of the slaves resembles the worship and God-wariness of slaves. The nobility of the merchants is like the worship and God-wariness of merchants. And the nobility of the freemen (*aḥrār*) is similar to the worship and God-consciousness of the freemen and thus is superior to the nobility of the other two groups.[i]

The God-consciousness of the Freemen

When the Imam says that he trains his soul with God-wariness so that it is secure on that day, this does not mean that his primary goal for cultivating God-wariness is to reach the station of safety [i.e., the God-wariness of the slave who seeks safety from the fire]. As mentioned in the preceding discussions, these levels are not on the same horizontal plane; rather, they exist on a vertical hierarchy.[ii] He who solely operates on the first or second level is deprived of the third stage. However, he who has arrived at the third stage—i.e., the worship of the freemen—can still benefit from the first two.

Hence, one may notice that in the whispered prayers and invocations of the saints of God, they are frightened and tearful out of fear of hellfire even though they worship God because they love Him and have reached the station of the freemen. This display of helplessness and lamenting does not imply that their station is limited to fear of the hellfire. This is because someone who has reached the station of yearning for God has both a fear of hell as well as a desire for "gardens beneath which rivers flow."[iii] His main concern, however, is love for God.

Hence, one should not ask why someone who has reached the station of freemen would say:

ابْكِي لِضِيقِ لَحْدِي

I weep for the narrowness of my grave.[iv]

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[i] See Endnote 8.
[ii] See Session 8 under the section "Nobility in the words of the Commander of the Faithful". [Ed.]
[iii] See Endnote 5.
[iv] Imam ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, "Duʿā Abū Ḥamzah Thumālī" in *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*.

This is because not only does he lament for the narrowness of his vault and grave, but he also burns because of its concomitant—i.e., his distance from the Truth.

Hence, when Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) says, "truly this is my soul that I have trained with God-wariness so that it gains safety on the day of the greatest fear,"[1] these are not his final words. It is true that God will place the God-wary in a safe place in the Hereafter, but He will also place them:

فِي مَقْعَدِ صِدْقٍ عِندَ مَلِيكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ

in the abode (maq'ad, lit. "seat") of truthfulness with an omnipotent King. (54:55)

In fact, prior to this verse near the end of the blessed Surah Qamar, God says:

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ

Indeed, the God-wary will be amid gardens and streams. (54:54)

This is the bodily and sensory reward for the God-wary. It is then that God says [in the next verse with regards to their suprasensory benefits]: "In the abode/seat of truthfulness with an omnipotent King" (54:55). Since they stood truthfully [in this world], they have an abode and seat of truth [in the Hereafter]. Their true footing has been mentioned in the beginning of Surah Yunus:

أَنَّ لَهُمْ قَدَمَ صِدْقٍ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ

... they have a sound footing with their Lord ... (10:2)

And their abode and seat of truth has been promised in Surah Qamar (54:55) which pertains to their intelligible and/or spiritual heaven.

In a noble verse, God says:

وَلِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ جَنَّتَانِ

For him who stands in awe of his Lord will be two heavens. (55:46)

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[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, letter 45.

Now, if what is intended by the "two heavens" is the sensory heaven (*jannah ḥissī*) and the intelligible heaven (*jannah ʿaqlī*), then it corresponds well with the above-mentioned verses of Surah Qamar in which the sensory heaven (54:54) and the intelligible heaven (54:55) have been mentioned one after the other. The intelligible heaven is one of the greatest and loftiest stations for the God-wary and the noble. And the statement of Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) of "truly this is my soul that I have trained with God-wariness so that it gains safety on the day of the greatest fear," refers only to the medial station of the people of God-wariness.

Moreover, it should be known that any honour or spiritual grace [*karāmah*] that the noble God has mentioned for the people of God-wariness is, in reality, an honour for the people of nobility as well. In this way, God has ennobled them.

God-wariness: the Core of all Virtues

Just as God-wariness is the core of nobility, it is also the core for many other virtues. God has described God-wariness as a principle and standard in the noble Qurʾān. For example, He calls mankind to justice precisely because justice is closely related to God-wariness [such as in verse 5:8]. Or for instance, in certain domestic affairs, He instructs individuals to relinquish their rights for the fact that forgiveness is closer to God-wariness [such as in verse 2:237].

From this it can be seen that God-wariness is a principle and standard. The criteria for the invitation to justice or forgiveness for example is based on how close such virtues can bring man to this central principle [of God-wariness]. Hence, we see that nobility revolves around the same core that all other virtues revolve around.

In Surah Māʾidah, God says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ
وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَآنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۚ اعْدِلُوا هُوَ
أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ

O you who have faith! Be the upholders, as witnesses for the sake of Allah, of justice; and ill feeling for a people should never lead you to be unfair. Be just; that is nearer to God-wariness... (5:8)

The oppression of the tyrant should not encourage you to repress them in retaliation [when you gain the upper hand over them]. You should observe justice [in all cases] since justice is close to God-wariness.

It is interesting that the Qur'ān does not say that God-wariness is close to justice. This is because God-wariness is the standard and yardstick whereas justice is not. If man has reached the station of justice, he is still midway on the path. The noble Qur'ān wants to make man noble; it does not simply wish to make him just for justice is only a medial human perfection. Therefore, God says:

إِنَّ اللَّـهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

Indeed Allah enjoins justice and benevolence ... (16:90)

First God invites man towards justice so that gradually He may raise him from justice to benevolence (*iḥsān*).

فَمَنِ اعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ

... So should anyone aggress against you, assail him in the manner he assailed you ... (2:194)

This verse refers to justice. But if a man lets the aggressor go then he has certainly been beneficent to him, and this is on a higher level than justice. Of course, our duty towards the unbelievers is to be "hard against the faithless" (48:29). However, among the believers, if someone transgresses against another, then justice is when the injured party retaliates to the same degree that he was harmed, while benevolence (*iḥsān*) is when he forgoes his claim altogether.

In any case, the verse of the Surah Mā'idah tells man that once he becomes just, he should strive to go beyond the level of justice since the bare minimum that man is called for is to be just. Justice is expected from all people. In fact, it is a condition for some religious tasks such as leadership. So the least amount

of perfection necessary for human beings is that they be just in the sense that they do not commit any sin nor forgo any obligatory act. This is the bare minimum and what is expected of them.

But God also tells man that once he has reached this bare minimum, he should not be content with it. Rather, he should strive to surpass this stage and reach the stage of benevolence. He who forgoes the recommended acts and performs the disapproved acts may still be just; but he who strives to perform the recommended acts and stay away from the disapproved ones is a person who is striving to draw closer to benevolence and God-wariness.

So in Surah Ḥadīd [57:25], when God says that the prophets have come so that people may initiate justice, this is the minimum obligation required from people. However, in order for man to reach the level of God-wariness, initiating justice is not sufficient; rather, they must be upholders and custodians of justice. Being an initiator of justice (*qā'im bi al-qisṭ*) is different from being an upholder of justice (*qawwām bi al-qisṭ*); in the latter case, such a man must be extremely prepared intellectually and practically.

A time may come when man must rise against himself or even against his children in order to protect the truth. Here being just or being an initiator of justice is not sufficient. Justice does not have the capacity to empower man to stand up against himself nor does initiating justice have the capacity to empower man to stand up against his own father, mother, or brother for the sake of the truth. Hence, initiating justice is not sufficient; one must also be able to uphold justice [if one wishes to take on this challenge].

In two places (using two different expressions), the noble Qur'ān says the following speaking to judges and witnesses regarding testimonial issues:

كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّـهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ

... Be upholders, as witnesses for the sake of Allah, of justice ... (5:8)

كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّـهِ

... Be upholders of justice, as witnesses for the sake of Allah ... (4:135)[1]

Only that person can hold a position [of justice] in these situations who is accustomed to upholding justice; hence, simply initiating justice is not enough.

In fact, in some of the jurisprudential books such as the *Sharāyiᶜ al-Islām* of Muḥaqqiq Ḥilli as well others, the condition for a judge has been stated as such: "The prerequisite for a judge is the perfection of his intellect (*kamāl al-ᶜaql*)." This is in contrast to what appears in other books where being sane or intelligent is sufficient. However, the former group has specified that the perfection of his intellect is a necessity for a judge. The reason for this is because the work that he intends to perform is of crucial importance. An ordinary intelligence is not adequate for this type of work; rather, it demands a higher form. In fact, the judge requires both a higher form of theoretical intellect (*ᶜaql-e naẓarī*) so that he does not fall into error in his discernments as well as a higher form of practical intellect (*ᶜaql-e ᶜamalī*) so that he does not become partial in his inclinations. Of course, this amount of intelligence is different to that which is required in order for an act of worship to become obligatory on someone [where what is meant by the condition of *ᶜaql* is for him to be sane and nothing more].

With regard to verse 8 of Surah Mā'idah, after having brought up the importance of upholding justice, the verse continues with:

اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ

Be just; that is nearer to God-wariness (5:8)

Justice is close to God-wariness. From this we can understand that man must travel to the boundaries of God-wariness itself (which is the core of nobility) and he should not stop midway at justice.

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[1] The complete verse reads: "O you who have faith! Be upholders of justice and witnesses for the sake of Allah, even if it should be against yourselves or [your] parents and near relatives, and whether it be [someone] rich or poor, for Allah has a greater right over them. So do not follow [your] desires, lest you should be unfair, and if you distort [the testimony] or disregard [it], Allah is indeed well aware of what you do." (4:135).

In the blessed Surah Baqarah, with regards to the rights of family members upon one another, God says:

إِلَّا أَن يَعْفُونَ أَوْ يَعْفُوَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ عُقْدَةُ النِّكَاحِ ۚ وَأَن تَعْفُوا أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ

... unless they forgo it, or someone in whose hand is the marriage tie forgoes it. And to forgo is nearer to God-wariness... (2:237)[i]

Either the [divorced] women themselves may forgive [the dowry] or their representative may forgive it. So God says that if you should forgo some of your rights so that the structure of the family might be preserved by this then this is closer to God-wariness.

From this it can be seen that God-wariness is the standard and core [of other virtues] and forgiveness is a virtue that facilitates reaching that core. Hence, in the illuminating words of the Commander of the Faithful, we find the following:

التُّقَى رَئِيسُ الأَخْلاَقِ

God-wariness is the chief of all virtues.[ii]

God-wariness is the leader of the remainder of ethical virtues of the soul. In other words, if justice, forgiveness, patience, and all other virtues are beautiful ethical qualities then the leader and guide of the beautiful ethical qualities is God-wariness. Moreover, since God-wariness is the core of nobility, it becomes clear that all of these virtues are the means through which man reaches the core and "head of all virtues" and hence, becomes noble.

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[i] The complete verse reads: "And if you divorce them before you touch them, and you have already settled a dowry for them, then [pay them] half of what you have settled, unless they forgo it, or someone in whose hand is the marriage tie forgoes it. And to forgo is nearer to God-wariness; so do not forget graciousness among yourselves. Indeed Allah sees best what you do" (2:237).

[ii] *Nahj al-balāghah*, saying 402.

The Levels of God-wariness in the Words of the Master of the God-wary

In the discourses of the Commander of the Faithful (ʿa), one finds many instances that indicate the greatness of God-wariness which, as we have seen, is the true basis of all the other virtues. Sometimes, he mentions God-wariness in the form of the fear of the hellfire which is the God-wariness of the slaves. At times, he mentions God-wariness displayed in the passion for Paradise, which is the God-wariness of merchants. At other times, he mentions the highest level of God-wariness, which is the God-wariness of the freemen and friends of God.

In Sermon 119 of the *Nahj al-balāghah*, the Imam says:

وَاتَّقُوا نَاراً حَرُّهَا شَدِيدٌ، وَقَعْرُهَا بَعِيدٌ، وَحِلْيَتُهَا حَدِيدٌ، وَشَرَابُهَا صَدِيدٌ. أَلاَ وَإِنَّ اللِّسَانَ الصَّالِحَ يَجْعَلُهُ اللهُ لِلْمَرْءِ فِي النَّاسِ، خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنَ الْمَالِ يُورِثُهُ مَنْ لاَ يَحْمَدُهُ

> Be wary of the fire whose flame is severe, whose pit is distant, whose finery is iron, and whose drink is festering. Know that the righteous name of a man retained by Allah, the Sublime, among the people is better than wealth which will be inherited by those who would not praise him [for receiving it].[i]

Here the Imam tells us to fear a fire whose flames are severe. In another place, the Imam describes hell as such:

دَارٌ لَيْسَ فِيها رَحْمَةٌ

An abode wherein there is no mercy.[ii]

There is no mercy found within hell; it is pure wrath. This form of God-wariness which exists at the level of fearing the fire is the God-wariness of the average person. However, the God-wariness that has been mentioned in the well-known "Sermon of the God-wary" is a higher form of God-wariness.

Some sermons of the *Nahj al-balāghah*, such as the "Sermon of the God-wary" that we now turn to, deserve to be recited with the same etiquette that we recite the Qur'ān since the spirit of

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[i] *Ibid.*, sermon 119 (120 in some versions).
[ii] *Ibid.*, letter 27.

the Qur'ān has been displayed therein. We should not simply refer to the *Nahj al-balāghah* only when we wish to give a lecture because the very act of reciting these words creates a spiritual light in man.

Hammām, who was a devout worshipper, made a request to Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa): "Describe for me the God-wary in such a way as though I see them." In other words: describe the God-wary to me in a manner in which they transform in my eyes from being mere concepts to perceptible realities. At first, the Imam refused to accept his request and only said to him, "Be wary of Allah" and then recited the verse "truly Allah is with those who are God-wary and those who are virtuous" (16:128). Hammām was not satisfied by this answer and insisted that the Imam continue. On witnessing the inner state of this man, the Imam began to depict the qualities of the God-wary:

فَالْمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا هُمْ أَهْلُ الْفَضَائِلِ: مَنْطِقُهُمُ الصَّوَابُ، وَمَلْبَسُهُمُ الاقْتِصَادُ، وَمَشْيُهُمُ التَّوَاضُعُ. غَضُّوا أَبْصَارَهُمْ عَمَّا حَرَّمَ اللهُ عَلَيْهِمْ، وَوَقَفُوا أَسْمَاعَهُمْ عَلَى الْعِلْمِ النَّافِعِ لَهُمْ. نَزَلَتْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ مِنْهُمْ فِي الْبَلاَءِ كَالَّتِي نَزَلَتْ فِي الرَّخَاءِ. لَوْ لاَ الأَجَلُ الَّذِي كَتَبَ اللهُ عَلَيْهِمْ لَمْ تَسْتَقِرَّ أَرْوَاحُهُمْ فِي أَجْسَادِهِمْ طَرْفَةَ عَيْنٍ، شَوْقاً إِلَى الثَّوَابِ، وَخَوْفاً مِنَ الْعِقَابِ. عَظَّمَ الْخَالِقُ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ فَصَغُرَ مَا دُونَهُ فِي أَعْيُنِهِمْ، فَهُمْ وَالْجَنَّةُ كَمَنْ قَدْ رَآهَا، فَهُمْ فِيهَا مُنَعَّمُونَ، وَهُمْ وَالنَّارُ كَمَنْ قَدْ رَآهَا، فَهُمْ فِيهَا مُعَذَّبُونَ. قُلُوبُهُمْ مَحْزُونَةٌ، وَشُرُورُهُمْ مَأْمُونَةٌ ... أَمَّا اللَّيْلَ فَصَافُّونَ أَقْدَامَهُمْ، تَالِينَ لاِجْزَاءِ الْقُرْآنِ يُرَتِّلُونَهَا تَرْتِيلاً، يُحَزِّنُونَ بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ، وَيَسْتَثِيرُونَ بِهِ دَوَاءَ دَائِهِمْ ... يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمُ النَّاظِرُ فَيَحْسَبُهُمْ مَرْضَى، وَمَا بِالْقَوْمِ مِنْ مَرَضٍ، وَيَقُولُ: قَدْ خُولِطُوا! وَلَقَدْ خَالَطَهُمْ أَمْرٌ عَظِيمٌ! ... قُرَّةُ عَيْنِهِ فِيمَا لاَ يَزُولُ، وَزَهَادَتُهُ فِيمَا لاَ يَبْقَى ...

Thus, the God-wary, are the people of distinction in the world. Their speech is exact, their dress is moderate, and their gait is humble. They lower their gaze with respect to that which Allah has made unlawful for them, and they lend an ear to that knowledge which is beneficial to

> them. They remain in the time of trials as though they remain in comfort. If it had not been for the appointed time [of death] which Allah has decreed for them, their spirits would not have remained in their bodies even for the twinkling of an eye due to eagerness for the reward and fear of chastisement. The Creator has been magnified in their souls so that everything else appears insignificant in their eyes. Thus to them heaven is as though they see it and are enjoying its favours [at the moment]. To them, the fire [of hell] is also as if they see it and are suffering punishment in it. Their hearts are grieved, they are protected against evils ... During the night they are upstanding on their feet reading portions of the Qur'ān and reciting it in a well-measured way, creating through it grief for themselves and seeking by it the cure for their ailments ... If anyone looks at them he surmises that they are ill while, in truth, they are not ill. He says that they have gone mad, but in fact, a grave matter has made them [appear] mad ... The coolness of his eye lies in that which lasts forever, while he keeps aloof from that which will not persist ... [i]

Among the phrases mentioned in this sermon, the Imam says:

> ... they lend an ear to that knowledge which is beneficial to them ...

Everyone knew at the time what beneficial knowledge referred to. After all, the Prophet had said:

إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ ثَلاَثَةٌ: ءَايَةٌ مُحْكَمَةٌ، أَوْ فَرِيضَةٌ عَادِلَةٌ، أَوْ سُنَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ؛ وَ مَا خَلاَهُنَّ فَهُوَ فَضْلٌ

> [Beneficial] knowledge is only three: a definitive sign [or proof], a proper ordinance, and a standing tradition; everything else is extra.[ii]

It is clear that beneficial knowledge[17] is only these three. All else may add to virtue and perfection but that which every Muslim must become acquainted with are these three. So Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa)

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[i] *Ibid.*, sermon 193.
[ii] *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, "Book of the virtues of knowledge," section 2, no. 1.

says that the God-wary are those who "lend their ear" to this type of knowledge which is beneficial.

The Imam continues:

> ... They remain in the time of trials as though they remain in comfort ...

They are the same in triumph and disaster because they understand that both are divine trials.

Then the Imam says:

> ... If it had not been for the appointed time [of death] which Allah has decreed for them, their spirits would not have remained in their bodies even for the twinkling of an eye due to eagerness for the reward and fear of chastisement ...

If it were not for the statement "due to eagerness for the reward and fear of chastisement," one may have been able to interpret the statement "if it had not been for the appointed time [of death] ..." as referring to the God-wariness of loftier individuals. However, the mention of reward and chastisement in the statement indicate that what is intended here is the God-wariness of the average person.

But the Imam continues:

> ... The Creator has been magnified in their souls so that everything else appears insignificant in their eyes ...

Now this is the highest station. The "everything else" that is mentioned is not just limited to the things of this world; rather, heaven and hell are also included in it. In other words, these [God-wary] souls believe that hell is far too insignificant for them to fear it and that heaven is also far too insignificant for them to be joyful with regards to it. Such individuals are those who labour due to a yearning for God.

Of course, there is no doubt that they have been saved from hell and that they have reached heaven. After all, the verse clearly states:

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ فِي مَقْعَدِ صِدْقٍ عِندَ مَلِيكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ

Indeed the God-wary will be amid gardens and streams, in the abode of truthfulness with an omnipotent King. (54:54-55)

Hence, they benefit from both levels [of God-wariness]. In fact, this is why heaven even yearns for them. As the Prophet (ṣ) said to Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa):

الْجَنَّةُ تَشْتَاقُ إِلَيْكَ وَ إِلَى عَمَّارٍ وَ إِلَى سَلْمَانَ وَ أَبِي ذَرٍّ وَ الْمِقْدَاد

Heaven longs for you [ᶜAlī], ᶜAmmār, Salmān, Abū Dharr, and Miqdād.[i]

It is important to remember that just because the tradition mentions Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa), ᶜAmmār, Salmān, Abū Dharr, and Miqdād by name (may Allah be pleased with them), it is only by way of example and does not limit this phenomenon to them exclusively.

Heaven Longs for the Heavenly

Heaven yearns for those people who have caused it to come into existence; hence, it yearns for the source of its being. This is because every effect is existentially connected to its cause. Now, if that effect has cognition, then that connection will be manifested in the form of desire and yearning.

In the tradition regarding the nocturnal ascension (*miᶜrāj*) of the Prophet as well as in other traditions, it has been mentioned that the Prophet was told to inform the people of the following:

أَنَّ الْجَنَّةَ مَاؤُهَا عَذْبٌ وَ تُرْبَتَهَا طَيِّبَةٌ فِيهَا قِيعَان

Surely, the water of heaven is fresh and it soil is pure and level.[ii]

In other words, the surface of heaven is bare. Man must cultivate it himself. The acts of his worship and invocations are trees in heaven. If this is the case, then heaven longs for its inhabitants just as a garden has need for a gardener. To say that we yearn for heaven is to say that through seeking intercession we want the intercessors to allow us entry into heaven. But to say

[i] *Khiṣāl*, ch. 5, no. 80.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 93, p. 174.

that heaven yearns for us is to say that it is the effect of our own work.

It does not make sense for a man to attain a position wherein the result of his action is heaven and at the same time he yearns for it. This is because no perfection becomes enthralled by that which is less and lower than itself. Hence, heaven yearns for the heavenly and not vice versa.

The basis of this is a universal principal in the intellectual sciences.[18] It also appears in the form of a particular saying of Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*):

فاعِلُ الخَيْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ

The doer of good is better than the act itself.[1]

This phrase is another way of restating the intellectual principle that every agent is higher than its act and every cause is stronger than its effect.

The Imam tells us that a good person is better than a good deed. Similarly the one who prays is better than the prayers itself and the warrior (*mujāhid*) is better than the war or struggle (*jihād*). The present discussion is not about the mystical reality of fasting, prayers, or *jihād* which the average believer does not have access to. Rather, our discussion is about that particular form of fasting, prayers, pilgrimage, and *jihād* which is the product of the average believers and which clears the way for them to enter heaven.

Through intellectual reasoning, we know that the man who prays is higher than his prayers, since these prayers are the effects of him and each cause is stronger than its effect. Now if the acts of devotion of a virtuous servant of God manifest themselves in the form of heaven, then this heaven—which is an existential effect of this virtuous servant—will certainly love this servant.

Therefore, if someone were to reach the station of justice and God-wariness, he would certainly have a higher station than heaven. Hence, *heaven will long for him*. Moreover, this phenomenon is not limited to Salmān and others like him. Such people have been mentioned as prominent examples. The truth is that

[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, saying 31.

anyone who becomes a sincere believer, heaven will long for him. He himself, however, will long for a different heaven—the heaven of the beatific encounter.

Going back to the statement of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) wherein he says, "the Creator has been magnified (*ʿaẓuma*) in their souls so that everything else appears insignificant in their eyes," we know that this illuminative statement is not just limited to this world; rather, it also encompasses heaven and hell. In other words, both heaven and hell are considered insignificant in the eyes of the God-wary since they have reached a higher station. It is not the case that both God and heaven are considered supreme in their souls. This is because the name "the all-Supreme" (*al-ʿaẓīm*) is one of the most beautiful Names (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) of God. Hence, if this name "the all-Supreme" manifests itself in someone's heart, it leaves no other room for something else to manifest itself as 'supreme' too.

The Imam continues the sermon:

> ... Thus to them heaven is as though they see it and are enjoying its favours [at the moment]. To them, the fire [of hell] is also as if they see it and are suffering punishment in it. Their hearts are grieved, they are protected against evils ...

The Imam carries on until he discusses the daily program of these people in terms of what they do during the nights and how they interact with the Qurʾān:

> ... During the night they are upstanding on their feet reading portions of the Qurʾān and reciting it in a well-measured way, creating through it grief for themselves and seeking by it the cure for their ailments ...

This is because the Qurʾān is "a cure for that which is in the hearts" (10:57). These individuals know the way to cure the ailments of the heart. Others may think that these people have been afflicted with some tribulation and have lost their minds. But they do not know that something has penetrated their souls, which pulls them towards it. Hence, the Imam says:

> ... If any one looks at them he surmises that they are ill while, in truth, they are not ill. He says that they have

> gone mad, but in fact, a grave matter has made them [appear] mad ...

Later on in the same sermon, the Imam says:

> ... The coolness (*qurrah*) of his eye lies in that which lasts forever, while he keeps aloof from that which will not persist ...

Qurrah means "coolness" of the eyes and not "light" of the eyes. On the first night of the grave, it will be said to the believer: "Sleep with the coolness of your eyes [i.e., sleep joyfully]."[i] In other words, live here with the coolness of your eyes. If tears are shed out of grief and sorrow then they are considered warm, but if they are tears of yearning then they are considered cool. Since man often cries when he is overcome with joy, the expression "coolness of the eyes" (*qurrah al-aʿyun*)[ii] is used [during states of joy]. The Prophet says: "The coolness of my eyes lies in prayers."[iii] In other words, my eyes are cooled by means of this joyous affair.

So when the Imam says, "The coolness of his eye lies in that which lasts forever," he means to say that his joy lies in an affair that is everlasting. Moreover, his aloofness and indifference is with regards to that which is impermanent.

When Imam ʿAlī (*ʿa*) concluded this sermon, Hammām let out a cry which literally "contained his soul." His soul departed from his body in that cry. This [effect] cannot be achieved through the process of acquired or discursive knowledge. At seeing this, the Imam said, "Truly, by Allah, I had feared this would happen to him for effectual counsels have this effect on those capable of receiving it." The Imam is saying: I had a feeling this state would overcome him and hence was fearful because an effectual counsel has such an effect.

A man objected to this and said, "Why did the same effect not take place in you?" The Imam replied tersely:

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[i] *ʿUsūl al-kāfi*, v. 3, p. 242.

[ii] The phrase *qurrah al-aʿyun* appears in verse 25:74—"And those who say, 'Our Lord! Grant us *the coolness of our eyes* in our spouses and descendants, and make us imams of the God-wary.'" [Ed.]

[iii] A reference to the famous Prophetic tradition: "Three things in this world were made beloved to me [by God]: women, perfume, [and prayers]; but the *coolness of my eyes* lies in prayers." *Al-Khiṣāl*, Section 3, Tradition 217. [Tr.]

> Woe to you. For death there is a fixed hour which cannot be exceeded, and a cause which does not change. Now look, never repeat such talk. For surely it is Satan who has put it on your tongue.

In other words, Satan has spoken through you. If only this man knew that not every tidal wave can sweep away the immense mountains. Not every speech can cause a Perfect Man such as ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ᶜ*a*) to let out a cry. If a tidal wave approaches, it sweeps away ordinary houses. But even the most destructive of tidal waves will not move a fortified dam. It is possible for an event to affect ordinary individuals, but it will not affect perfect men [such as Imam ᶜAlī].

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

Session Twelve

A Summary of our Discussion

Our discussion was about the nobility of man in the noble Qur'ān. This session will attempt to tie up the discussions in the previous sessions and will act as our concluding remarks on this topic.

The sequential order of any [ethical] discussion follows this pattern: First, an attempt is made to understand the topic at hand. Then the existence of the topic is ascertained. Subsequently, the path of acquiring that which is desired is discussed and its impediments are also reviewed. In the parlance of logic, we can say that first we discuss the quiddity itself and answer the question "what is it?" (*mā huwa*) wherein a description of the topic is offered. After this, we answer the question "does it exist?" (*hal huwa*) wherein we discuss the existence of the topic itself. Thereafter, we answer the question "why is it?" (*lima huwa*) wherein we turn our attention to its causes. Finally, we end with any remaining matters.

In our sessions so far, nobility was discussed in the same way. First we posed the question: "What is nobility?" When the meaning of nobility was clarified, the question was raised: "Does nobility exist?" In other words, does it really exist or is it simply a mere mental construct [without an extension in the external world]? After we proved that it does in fact exist, we stated the proof for its existence in terms of why it comes about. Finally, we discussed the different types of nobility, its various dimensions, the factors that cause its emergence, and the obstacles that hinder it from coming into being. By means of the various verses of the noble Qur'ān and the traditions that were presented in the preceding discussions, all these matters were clarified.

The Criterion of God-wariness is neither Relative nor Transient

The focus of our attention in this session is on how God has identified God-wariness as a stable and everlasting [spiritual] standard. He says:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّـهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

...Indeed the noblest of you with Allah is the most God-wary among you... (49:13)

In other words, the criterion for nobility in the eyes of God is God-wariness. The more that God-wariness increases, the more that nobility will also increase with God. Now since God is the Truth and is eternal, whatever is *with* God will also be everlasting. Hence we can say that first of all, the standard of nobility is stable and true, and hence not fictitious. Second, it is permanent and eternal, and hence not relative.

This is exactly what they mean when they say that the principles of ethics are true and absolute. Ethics are not relative like customs and traditions which differ from nation to nation. This is because customs and traditions are related to the secondary aspects of life whereas ethics is related to the principle aspects of life. Moreover, the principle aspects of life have to do with the very humanness of human beings, which never changes. He who created man created him with specific dispositions:

فِطْرَتَ اللَّـهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّـهِ

... the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind. There is no altering Allah's creation ... (30:30)

Neither do the essential dispositions of man change nor do they differ between different areas, races, nations, or time periods. This is because ethics has come to rectify the souls and natures of men, which always remain constant and the same. Hence, ethical principles are also constant and the same.

Moreover, the Qur'ān also attests to the same conclusions when it says:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّـهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

... Indeed the noblest of you with Allah is the most God-wary among you ... (49:13)

Anything that is *with* God is permanent since:

مَا عِندَكُمْ يَنفَدُ ۖ وَمَا عِندَ اللَّـهِ بَاقٍ

That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allah shall last ... (16:96)

Further, anything that is with God is also true since:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّـهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ

That is because Allah is the Truth ... (22:6)

After all, that which is *with* the Truth will inevitably be true.

Therefore, the principles of ethics are not only true but also stable and eternal. Of course, when we speak of the everlastingness of God, it is in a negating sense (*maʿnāye salbī*) whereas when we speak of the everlastingness of the world—i.e., his emanation—it is in an affirming sense (*maʿnāye thubūtī*). To explain, the meaning of God's everlastingness is that He does not have a beginning nor is He preceded by another or by nonexistence. In contrast, the everlastingness of the emanation of God means that it is preceded by another and by essential nonexistence. It has a beginning even though it may always have existed in the presence of God. This is what is meant by positive sense.

The Noble Man is a Locus of Manifestation for the Noble God

Nobility makes man a locus of manifestation (*maẓhar*) for the noble God. The goal of discussing nobility is for man to become the manifestation of this name. Principally, the purpose of all ethical discussions is that man becomes the manifestation of those Names which he strives to intellectually comprehend and to practically grasp. If he is involved in discussing nobility then he should become a manifestation of the name of God, the Noble (*al-karīm*). Any existent which possesses the perfection befitting itself and is free from every imperfection and defect is called 'noble'. Hence, if a being does not possess its necessary perfection and is afflicted with imperfections and defects then it has not achieved the nobility of its type. A noble being is one that first of all possesses all of the things that its existence demands and secondly does so in a sound way. As a result, it is not troubled with limitations and faults and thus is noble.

Sometimes God has praised plants as being noble:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَمْ أَنبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍ كَرِيمٍ

Have they not regarded the earth, how many We have caused to grow in it of every noble kind [of vegetation]? (26:7)

Sometimes, in certain cultures, even inanimate things are described as being noble, such as "a noble gem." The reason for this is because the particular item that has been described, relative to its own species, is free of imperfection.

In some parts of the Dawn Supplication of the blessed month of Ramaḍān (which is one of the best prayers and has been related from Imam Bāqir), we have been encouraged to ask God to help us attain all the divine signs:

اَللّٰهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْئَلُكَ مِنْ آيَاتِكَ بِأَكْرَمِهَا، وَ كُلُّ آيَاتِكَ كَرِيمَةٌ، اَللّٰهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْئَلُكَ بِآيَاتِكَ كُلِّهَا

O God, truly, I ask you for the most noble (*akram*) from among Your signs, though all of Your signs are noble (*karīmah*). O God, I ask you for Your signs, all of them.[1]

This is because the signs of the Noble are also noble. It is not possible for a thing to be defective or incomplete while being a sign of perfection and flawlessness. In His existence and the perfection of His existence, God is the most perfect of all perfections to the extent that his most sacred Essence has been referred to as being "beyond completion" (*fawq al-tāmm*). This implies that all complete beings obtain their completion from Him. Therefore, His signs should also be complete and free from every defect and imperfection, and should be noble vis-à-vis its own species. Hence, all of the signs of God are noble— whether they are the written signs and verses (*āyāt-e tadwīnī*) of the noble Qur'ān or the existential signs (*āyāt-e takwīnī*) of the mysteries of creation.

There is no doubt that all of God's signs are noble but in so far as nobility has an existential dimension and in so far as existence itself is gradational, it follows that nobility too possesses degrees. Hence, in the supplication mentioned above, we entreat God to make us attain the noblest sign (*akram al-āyāt*).

[1] The "Dawn Supplication" during the blessed month of Ramaḍān, in *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*.

Similarly, God encourages us in the Qur'ān that we should acquire not just the status of 'noble' but in fact, the status of 'the noblest'.

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّـهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

Indeed the noblest of you with Allah is the most God-wary among you. (49:13)

In other words, strive to be more God-wary than others so that you may be nobler than them. Moreover, the most God-wary has been identified by the Qur'ān in the following manner, and hence by extension, the noblest:

وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الْأَتْقَى الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّىٰ وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِندَهُ مِن نِّعْمَةٍ تُجْزَىٰ

The most God-wary shall be spared it—he who gives his wealth to purify himself and does not expect any reward from anyone. (92:17-19)

Obtaining the station of 'the noblest'—which is possible through possessing a lofty ambition and benefiting from the noble inheritance of knowledge—is a path that is open to all. Therefore, both the verses of the noble Qur'ān and the "verses" of the book of creation are all signs of nobility. God has invited all of us towards the locus of witnessing (*mashhad*) and locus of presence (*maḥḍar*) of nobility along with these written verses and existential signs so that we become the manifestation of God, who is the Noble. Moreover, since God-wariness has different dimensions, certainly nobility also has different dimensions.

Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) has said that God has sent his most noble Prophet (ṣ) in order to honour the Islamic ummah. The reason why the pious are noble is because they sacrifice the pseudo-beloved (*maḥbūb-e majāzī*)—such as wealth, etc.—for the true beloved (*maḥbūb-e haqīqī*).

لَن تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّىٰ تُنفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ

You will never attain piety until you spend out of what you hold dear ... (3:92)

Similarly, the reason why worldly individuals are deprived of nobility is because they consider the pseudo-beloved—i.e., the wealth of this world—to be essential, and hence completely attach their hearts to it:

وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا

And you love wealth with abounding love. (89:20)

In other instances, the basis of nobility has been juxtaposed to lowliness and the wares of this world (*dunyā*). At times, the term "this world" appears in the feminine form (*adnā'*) and at other times in its masculine form (*dunyā*):

يَأْخُذُونَ عَرَضَ هَـٰذَا الْأَدْنَىٰ

... they grab the transitory gains of this lower world... (7:169)

In other words, the wares of this world are the basis of lowliness and ignobleness. Hence, the world and its devotees are [the embodiment of] lowliness whereas the abode of the God-wary and its inhabitants are [the embodiment of] nobility.

The Levels of God-wariness in the Words of the Master of the God-wary

We shall mention some examples from the *Nahj al-balāghah* on the subject of God-wariness in order to shed light on its various dimensions, which reflect its various degrees.

In Sermon 24, while discussing the issue of *jihād* and combat in the way of the Truth, he says:

وَلَعَمْرِي مَا عَلَيَّ مِنْ قِتَالِ مَنْ خَالَفَ الحَقَّ، وَخَابَطَ الغَيَّ مِنْ إِدْهَانٍ وَلاَ إِيهَانٍ فَاتَّقُوا اللهَ عِبَادَ اللهِ، وَفِرُّوا إِلَى اللهِ مِنَ اللهِ وَامْضُوا فِي الَّذِي نَهْجَهُ لَكُمْ، وَقُومُوا بِمَا عَصَبَهُ بِكُمْ فَعَلِيَّ ضَامِنٌ لِفَلْجِكُمْ آجِلاً، إِنْ لَمْ تُمْنَحُوهُ عَاجِلاً

I swear by my life, I will not take light or weaken [my resolve] to fight against one who opposes the truth and gropes in misguidance. O servants of Allah, be God-wary and flee unto Allah from Allah. Proceed on the path He has laid down for you and stand by what He has enjoined

> upon you. [If you do this] then ᶜAlī will guarantee your eventual success though you may not obtain it immediately.[i]

The Imam begins by saying:

> I swear by my life ...

Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) begins by taking an oath on his own blessed life. This is because it is possible that man reaches such a position where his life can become the basis of an oath.[ii] The being of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) is like the soul of the most noble Prophet (ṣ), and God has sworn by the life of the most noble Prophet:

لَعَمْرُكَ إِنَّهُمْ لَفِي سَكْرَتِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

By your life, they were bewildered in their drunkenness. (15:72)

Allah says to the Prophet (ṣ): I swear *by your life* that these people [in the city of Lot] are disoriented, moving around drunken. Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) also swears *by his life* and says:

> ... I will not take light or weaken [my resolve] to fight against one who opposes the truth and gropes in misguidance.

He swears by his life that in his confrontation with those who oppose the truth and who are soiled and afflicted with misguidance, he will not be of those who compromise and take it easy.

After recounting the greatness of fighting against oppression, he continues:

> ... O servants of Allah, be wary of Allah ...

This God-wariness is with regards to *jihād*, and in the field of combat and warfare, it will lead to nobility.

The Imam then says:

> ... and flee unto Allah from Allah ...

A true monotheist knows that there is no danger except that it issues from God just as there is no refuge [from danger] except that it too can be found with God. After all, God says:

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[i] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 24.

[ii] Normally, when one wishes to take an oath, he does so on something that is considered sacred or notable. [Ed.]

وَلِلَّـهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

... To Allah belong the armies of the heavens and the earth ... (48:4)

If this is the case [that all armies belong to Him] and if there is no being that is entirely independent in any aspect, it follows that so long as God does not grant His permission, no one will be inflicted with any afflictions. At the same time, in so far as God's armies encompass every part of the existential world, without His explicit orders, He does not grant refuge to anyone.

This saying ["and flee unto Allah from Allah"] is one of the loftiest teachings of the unity of God found in the *Nahj al-balāghah*. In some of the supplications [of the Imams], we find expressions such as, "I seek refuge in Your good-pleasure from Your wrath. I seek refuge in Your forgiveness from Your anger."[1] As man traverses through the various [spiritual] levels—i.e., from one act (*fiʿl*) of the Truth to another, and from one attribute (*waṣf*) of the Truth to another—he reaches a point where he seeks refuge from the essence (*dhāt*) of the Truth in the essence of the Truth. The statement "I seek refuge in You from You" is one of the highest forms of association and disassociation (*tawallī wa tabarrī*).

The Imam then continues:

> Proceed on the path He has laid down for you and stand by what He has enjoined upon you. [If you do this] then ʿAlī will guarantee your eventual success though you may not obtain it immediately.

These are the words of a noble man who only speaks with the permission of God. He says: If you should rise up and not achieve victory in the near future [in this world] then I, ʿAlī, will be your guarantor that you will triumph in the end [in the Hereafter].

This is the God-wariness of *jihād* and defence; as such, it is also the nobility of this field.

In Sermon 176, wherein the Imam recounts the greatness of the Qurʾān, he also shows man the path to nobility and says:

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[1] Among the supplicatory phrases recommended for the 15th of Shaʿbān, we find the following: "I seek refuge in Your forgiveness from Your punishment; I seek refuge in Your good-pleasure from Your anger; I seek refuge in Your mercy from Your chastisement; I seek refuge in You from You." [Ed.]

> Beware from fragmenting ethical virtues and changing them. Maintain one voice. Let man preserve his tongue for surely this tongue is recalcitrant with respect to its owner. By Allah, I do not find a God-wary servant whose God-wariness benefits him unless he has preserved his tongue. Certainly, the tongue of a believer is behind [i.e., it follows] his heart; and truly, the heart of a hypocrite is behind [i.e., it follows] his tongue. This is because when a believer intends to say something, he [first] thinks about it within himself—if he finds it good, he discloses it; but if he finds it bad, he buries it. But the hypocrite speaks whatever comes to his tongue without distinguishing between what is [ultimately good] for him and what is against him. Surely, the Prophet of Allah (ṣ) said: "the belief of a person cannot be firm unless his heart is firm, and his heart cannot be firm unless his tongue is firm." So whoever among you has the ability to meet Allah, the Sublime, while his palms are not smeared with the blood of Muslims and their property and while his tongue is safe from exposing them, then let him do so.[1]

The Imam begins by saying:

> Beware from fragmenting ethical virtues and changing them ...

As was indicated at the beginning of this discussion, ethical virtues are true and stable. They are not like conventional customs nor are they like transient and relative affairs. This is because anything that pertains to races, nations, or bodies is either arbitrary [i.e., conventionally agreed upon] or if it is based on truth, then it is relative. In contrast, that which pertains to the immaterial spirits [such as ethics] is real not conventional, and is stable and absolute, not relative.

Hence, the Imam is saying that man should not fragment ethical virtues (*akhlāq*)—i.e., he should not consent to their being made relative—nor should he change them from one state to another [based on situational and temporal changes]. The Imam continues:

> ... Maintain one voice ...

[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 176.

Literally, make your tongue one. Now, the tongue will not become one unless the heart becomes one. And the heart will not unify unless it is deposited in the trust of the "Transformer of the hearts" (*Muqallib al-qulūb*).[1] This is not like a mutual agreed pact that is signed by two governments. A mutually agreed pact and treatise is a conventional affair. With one stroke of the pen it comes about, and with another it is nullified. But the pact on the Muslim Ummah is divine.

So the tongue follows the heart and the heart follows the Transformer of the hearts. Hence, without believing in the Oneness of God, no two people can truly become united. The Imam then says:

> ... Let man preserve his tongue ...

Each man should watch over his own tongue and not say everything that comes to his mind. The Imam explains:

> ... for surely this tongue is recalcitrant with respect to its owner ...

The tongue is like a rebellious mount that puts its rider in jeopardy. The Imam then says:

> ... By Allah, I do not find a God-wary servant whose God-wariness benefits him unless he has preserved his tongue ...

The Imam is saying: I swear by God that that I do not see a man who is attached to a God-wariness such that it benefits him unless he has protected his tongue prior to it. He continues:

> ... Certainly, the tongue of a believer is behind [i.e., it follows] his heart ...

To say that the tongue of a believer is "behind" his heart is to say that it receives its orders from the heart. Now, if the heart is internally scattered, it will not be one voice. If it appears to be one voice on the surface, it is, in reality, a false oneness. Hidden

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[1] The term "transformer of the hearts" is taken from the "Prayer of the Drowned Man" (*Duʿā al-gharīq*) taught by the sixth Imam (ʿa) for anyone who is "drowning" in confusion and has no hope of salvation. The prayer is as follows: "O Allah, O the Merciful, O the Compassionate, *O the Transformer of hearts*. Make firm my heart upon Your path." [Ed.]

within every *false* oneness, is a *true* division since it is not possible for two contradictories to be false together. Hence, if oneness is false, then division is true.

The Imam then says:

> ... and truly, the heart of a hypocrite is behind [i.e., it follows] his tongue ...

To say that the hypocrite first speaks and then thinks is to say that his heart is not his own. In principle, his heart does say to him: "utter these words". This fact [that the heart is the source of what is uttered] is something that can be proved intellectually. The Imam does not want to say that the hypocrite speaks before he thinks while the believer thinks before he speaks. Rather, the Imam is saying the following: The hypocrite also thinks *before* he speaks, but he thinks that he should speak in a double-tongued manner regardless of the [ultimate] consequences. In contrast, the believer thinks that he should speak in accordance with the truth so that later he may benefit from what he has said.

So the Imam does not wish to say that the tongue of the hypocrite is not behind his heart, but his heart is behind his tongue. In fact, someone who is like this—i.e., someone who speaks before he thinks—is a fool not a hypocrite. Rather, the Imam is saying that a hypocrite is someone who sits down, forms a decision, concocts a scheme, lays out a plan, and finally says something false based on that plan.

So when the Imam says that the tongue of a believer follows his heart while the heart of a hypocrite follows his tongue, what he implies by the second half of the statement is that the very way of thinking of the hypocrite is in this manner.[19] To interpret the second half in any other way would then shift the discussion to a fool, not a hypocrite, because a hypocrite does in fact, think and scheme before he says anything.

The Imam then offers a reason for his above remark in these words:

> ... This is because when a believer intends to say something, he [first] thinks about it within himself—if he finds it good, he discloses it; but if he finds it bad, he buries it. But the hypocrite speaks whatever comes to his tongue

> without distinguishing between what is [ultimately good] for him and what is against him ...

At first glance, one may be tempted to interpret the final sentence of the passage as such: the hypocrite realizes after having said something that it was to his detriment. But such an interpretation would necessitate considering the hypocrite as a fool [since only fools speak before they think]. In reality, the hypocrite actually does sit down, plan out a scheme, and finally says exactly what he wants to say: anything that will go against the Truth, he will utter; anything that will benefit the Truth, he will conceal.

The Imam then concludes this section of the sermon by saying:

> Surely, the Prophet of Allah (ṣ) said: "the belief of a person cannot be firm unless his heart is firm, and his heart cannot be firm unless his tongue is firm." So whoever among you has the ability to meet Allah, the Sublime, while his palms are not smeared with the blood of Muslims and their property and while his tongue is safe from exposing them, then let him do so.

The way to do this is to begin by rectifying our tongues.

In Sermon 190, the Imam says:

> عِبَادَ اللّٰهِ أُوصِيكُمْ بِتَقْوَى اللّٰهِ فَإِنَّهَا حَقُّ اللّٰهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ الْمَوجِبَةُ عَلَى اللّٰهِ حَقِّكُمْ وَ أَنْ تَسْتَعِينُوا عَلَيْهَا بِاللّٰهِ وَ تَسْتَعِينُوا بِهَا عَلَى اللّٰهِ فَإِنَّ التَّقْوَى فِي الْيَوْمِ الْحِرْزُ وَ الْجُنَّةُ وَ فِي غَدٍ الطَّرِيقُ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ

> I advise you, O servants of Allah, that you should be God-wary because it is a right of Allah over you and it is that which necessitates your right over Allah, and that you should seek Allah's help in [attaining] it, and its help in [attaining] Allah. Certainly, God-wariness is a protection and a shield for you today [in this world], and it is the road to Paradise for you tomorrow [in the next world].[1]

The Imam begins by advising the people:

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[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 190.

> I advise you, O servants of Allah, that you should be God-wary because it is a right of Allah over you

Now, since nobility revolves around God-wariness [and since one of the rights of God over man is for him to be God-wary], one of the rights of God over mankind is for man to be noble. This explains a tradition wherein the sixth Imam says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ فَوَّضَ إِلَى الْمُؤْمِنِ أُمُورَهُ كُلَّهَا وَ لَمْ يُفَوِّضْ إِلَيْهِ أَنْ يُذِلَّ نَفْسَه

> Truly Allah, the Exalted, entrusted all of the affairs of the believer to the believer himself; but He did not entrust him with dishonouring his own soul.[1]

God left the believer free over his own affairs with the condition that he cannot say that he is the owner of his own honour. Hence, he cannot relieve himself from preserving his own honour and from becoming noble. Rather, the nobility of man is a right of God upon His servants just as preserving one's soul is a right of God upon His servants. For this reason, both murder and suicide are considered grave sins.

To summarize, in so far as God-wariness is God's right over His servants, and in so far as God-wariness is the basis of nobility, it follows that ennobling the soul is God's right over His servants. After all, God created man to be noble; hence, if a man does not ennoble himself, in effect, he has violated God's right over him.

The Imam then says:

> ... and it [i.e., God-wariness] is that which necessitates your right over Allah ...

Essentially, that which is created can have no rights over the Creator. Therefore, here, God being necessitated to give man a right is really out of His grace. This is similar to when God says:

كَتَبَ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

... He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself ... (6:12)

The Imam then says:

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[1] *Furūᶜ al-kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 64.

> ... [I advise you] that you should seek Allah's help in [attaining] God-wariness, and its help in [attaining] Allah. Certainly, God-wariness is a protection and a shield for you today [in this world], and it is the road to Paradise for you tomorrow [in the next world].

In this world, God-wariness is a fortified castle and a strong shield against sins. Today it is a protection and shield (*junnah*) and tomorrow it is the path to heaven (*jannah*).

In another part of this same sermon, the Imam says:

كُونُوا عَنِ الدُّنْيَا نُزَّاهاً وَ إِلَى الآخِرَةِ وُلَّاهاً وَ لاَ تَضَعُوا مِنْ رَفَعَتْهُ التَّقْوَى وَ لاَ تَرْفَعُوا مِنْ رَفَعَتْهُ الدُّنْيَا

> Be of those who steer clear (*nuzzāh*) from this world and be of those who are infatuated with the next world. Do not disparage the one that God-wariness has elevated, and do not elate the one that this world has elevated.[1]

Man should have a craving and yearning with respect to the Hereafter. Of course, this does not mean that with respect to this world, man should be negligent and unfocused since one of the clearest signs of worldliness is idleness. Rather, that which is intended is that man frees himself from anything that hinders nobility.

Man should be of those who both consider God immaculate (*ahl al-tasbīḥ*) and sanctify him (*ahl al-taqdīs*). To be of those who consider Him immaculate means to free Him from every defect. To be of those who sanctify Him means to not limit Him to this actual perfection. God is the all-Immaculate (*subbūḥ*), the all-Holy (*quddūs*). In other words, He is that Essence which is worthy of being immaculate and deserving sanctification. So to consider Him immaculate is to free the Sublime Truth from every defect and imperfection; to sanctify Him is to free the Sublime Truth from every limited perfection. Hence, as an example, not only is God free from ignorance, but even this [limited] knowledge which we ascribe to angels and mankind is not worthy of God.

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[1] *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 190.

This idea of *being free* (*tanzīh*) from something applies to man as well. The Imam is saying that a God-wary man is one who is *free* from this world. The Imam then continues:

> ... Do not disparage the one that God-wariness has elevated, and do not elate the one that this world has elevated.

The standard by which the worth of man is measured should be clear from the outset. If God-wariness has promoted someone, do not demote them. However, if the world has promoted someone, then do not elate them. One can ascertain from this that the world stands in opposition to God-wariness. Vices manifest themselves in the form of the world and the world appears in the guise of vices.

In Sermon 192, which is called the "Sermon of Disparagement", the Imam says:

وَالْتِصَاقِ كَرَائِمِ الْجَوَارِحِ بِالأَرْضِ تَصَاغُراً

> ... [Allah protects His servants by means of the prayers which they achieve] by placing the noble limbs on the earth in humbleness ...[1]

The Imam is saying that God has instructed us to place the noblest parts of our body on the earth so that we may achieve nobility. These limbs and parts of the body—that are divine blessings—are referred to as "nobilities". Man's eyes are noble as are his ears. In a famous statement we read, "the person who loves his two nobilities ... " (which means "the person who loves his two eyes") should not read in the dark. In fact, one of the etiquettes of reading is that man should take care of his eyes.

The eyes, ears, and other body parts have been called "nobilities". The soul, which is more important than all of them, has also been named "nobility". In one of the prayers of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜ*a*) in the *Nahj al-balāghah*, the following appears:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْ نَفْسِي أَوَّلَ كَرِيمَةٍ تَنْتَزِعُهَا مِنْ كَرَائِمِي وَ أَوَّلَ وَدِيعَةٍ
تَرْتَجِعُهَا مِنْ وَدَائِعِ نِعَمِكَ عِنْدِي

[1] *Ibid.*, sermon 192.

> O Allah, let my soul be the first noble thing that you extract from among my noble things and the first trust that you take back from among the trusts of your blessings upon me.[i]

O God, all of these blessings and perceptive faculties that you have endowed upon me are noble and honourable. They are all trusts that belong to You that must be returned. Our souls are noble and entrusted like our eyes and ears. O God, let my soul be the first noble trust that You take from me. Let it not be that You first take my eyes or ears thus making me dependent upon others before you take my life.

As mentioned above, in the Sermon of Disparagement, man has been instructed to rub his noble limbs in the dust in God's threshold so that he may remain safe from the harm of every form of lowliness and baseness.

> ... [Allah protects His servants by means of the prayers which they achieve] by placing the noble limbs on the earth in humbleness ...[ii]

To rub the forehead in the dust, which is one of recommended Prophetic practices, is done in order to free man from the harm of every pride and selfishness.

In Sermon 198, the Imam says regarding the Holy Prophet (ṣ):

> جَعَلَهُ اللّٰهُ [سُبْحَانَهُ] بَلاَغاً لِرِسَالَتِهِ وَ كَرَامَةً لِأُمَّتِهِ وَ رَبِيعاً لِأَهْلِ زَمَانِهِ وَ رِفْعَةً لِأَعْوَانِهِ وَ شَرَفاً لِأَنْصَارِهِ
>
> Allah made him [i.e., the Prophet] a conveyer of His message, a [means of] nobility for his people, a period of bloom for those of his epoch, a source of elevation for his supporters, and an honour for his helpers.

God has sent His Prophet (ṣ) in order to honour you. This shows that God wants you to be noble for God did not send an average or ordinary man as a prophet to you; rather, He has sent the most excellent of His creatures to you.

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[i] *Ibid.*, sermon 215.
[ii] *Ibid.*, sermon 192.

This concludes our discussion on the topic. Let us end with a supplication in which we ask the Almighty to grant every one of us nobility:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْ نُفُوسنا أَوَّلَ كَرِيمَةٍ تَنْتَزِعُهَا مِنْ كَرَائِمِنا وَ أَوَّلَ وَدِيعَةٍ تَرْتَجِعُهَا مِنْ وَدَائِعِ نِعَمِكَ عِنْدِنا اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ نَذْهَبَ عَنْ قَوْلِكَ أَوْ أَنْ نُفْتَتَنَ عَنْ دِينِكَ أَوْ تَتَابَعَ بِنَا أَهْوَاؤُنَا دُونَ الْهُدَى الَّذِي جَاءَ مِنْ عِنْدِك

O Allah, let our souls be the first noble thing that you extract from among our nobilities and the first trust that you take back from among the trusts of your blessings upon us. O Allah, we seek refuge in You from departing from Your Word and from diverging from Your religion (*dīn*) and from being overcome by our desires instead of the guidance that has come from You.[i]

And all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.

[i] Modified prayer from *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 215.

Endnotes

1. To understand the argument proposed here, a few preliminaries are required. The first is regarding mental constructs. Muslim logicians and philosophers have discussed many types of mental constructs, but our concern here is with two: (1) The first is termed quiddity (*māhiyyah*, lit. "what-is-it-ness"). It is the construct that man formulates usually directly from his observation of external phenomena, such as his conceptions of 'tree' and 'whiteness'. (2) The second is termed secondary philosophical intelligible (*maʿqūl thāniyah falsafī*). It is also derived from observing external phenomena, but unlike the first case, the conception is not immediate. It is acquired through intellectual analysis, such as the conceptions of 'cause' and 'effect' which is attained when man observes the relationship between a fire (cause) and heat (effect) for example. One of the main differences between the two types of constructs, especially in post-Sadrian philosophy, is that quiddities, in reality, point to particular limitations of existence and not to independent realities. In this sense, it is a conventional concept since what is actually out there is existence and not the quiddity in question. In contrast, the philosophical intelligible points to a particular *mode* of existence (*nahw wujūd*) that actually does exist. In this sense, unlike quiddities, philosophical intelligibles are *positively* related to existence. The second preliminary that is needed to understand the author's argument pertains to the difference between univocal and equivocal. A word is used 'univocally' when it carries one meaning for many instances. However, when it carries different meanings in different instances, it is said to be 'equivocal'. Now, in so far as God is pure existence, He has no quiddity (for there is no limit to His existence). Hence, if nobility is predicated of Him, it implies that

nobility is not a quiddity (for a limitation of existence cannot be attributed to limitless existence). Moreover, since the term 'nobility' is used for God in the same way that it is used for man, the term is univocal. Thus, nobility—regardless of whether it pertains to God or man—does not fall into any one of Aristotle's "categories" which pertain to quiddities. Moreover, in so far as nobility is not a quiddity, it implies that it has been abstracted from a *mode* of existence; hence, it is not a mere mental construct but is directly and positively related to existence itself. In other words, it points to a real phenomenon (which the author alludes to in Session 12). Moreover, since it is derived from a mode of existence, it can be attributed with strength (*shiddah*) and weakness (*ḍaᶜf*) in the same way that existence itself can be attributed with strength and weakness. This latter point serves to illustrate the difference between God's nobility and man's nobility; it also explains why the term noble (*karīm*) can be used in the comparative and superlative (*akram*) forms as well. [Ed.]

2. Although it can be argued that the term *karāmah* is equivocal in the sense that it conveys two distinct denotations: (1) nobility and (2) spiritual grace—where one is general while the other is particular or where one conveys the explicit meaning while the other alludes to the subtext and implicit meaning—what the respected author is stating here is that the term is a univocal term (despite the apparently "different" meanings it may carry). One way to understand this is through the idea that a single concept may carry within it various degrees and aspects; the author has alluded to this in Part I of the book's introduction. [Ed.]
3. In Arabic, there is no explicit verb 'to be' which links the subject to its predicate; it is simply assumed. For example, "*Zaydun ᶜālimun*" (lit. "Zayd scholar") means "Zayd *is* a scholar." At times, however, the verb *kāna* is used which carries the idea of the verb 'to

be' but often implies continuity. In the above verse of the Qur'ān, the negative form of the verb *kāna* appears in the phrase *mā lam takūnū taʿlamūn* which could have been expressed as *mā lam taʿlamū* or *mā lā taʿlamūn* (i.e., *without* the verb *kāna*); in fact, these latter two forms appear many times in the Qur'ān (see, for example: 2:30, 7:62, 12:86, 6:91, 48:27) with the meaning "that which you do/did not know." The respected author is suggesting that by utilizing the verb *kāna* (with its sense of continuity)—albeit in its negative form—in the above verse, it implies that man did not have the very *capability* of knowing the teachings of the prophets prior to their arrival. [Ed.]

4. One of the topics discussed in ʿIlm al-Uṣūl al-Fiqh (the Principles of Jurisprudence) under the section of "Denotation" (*dilālah*) pertains to the concept of non-conditionality (*iṭlāq*) and generality (*ʿumūm*). In attempting to understand the denotation of the verses of the Qur'ān or the *aḥādīth*, a jurist is often faced with a situation wherein a particular command or statement has been issued in an absolute manner (i.e., without conditions) even though the context of it may restrict it to a particular referent. However, unless there are other verses, narrations, or intellectual reasons that restrict the non-conditionality of the original statement, the jurist will generally interpret it in an absolute manner—i.e., in an unconditional way. In the example mentioned by the respected author regarding the verse "seek the means of recourse to Him" (5:35), the "means of recourse" is stated in an unconditional manner. In other words, seek *any* means of recourse to Him. What the author is arguing is that before we pronounce the non-conditionality of the phrase "means of recourse" to include any form of it, we should determine what exactly can be a means of recourse, or more precisely, a means of recourse *to Him*. In fact, the phrase "to Him" is itself a condition which limits the non-conditionality of the phrase "means of recourse" to only include those

"means" that can actually take a person towards God. [Ed.]

5. *Maẓhar* literally means the locus of *ẓuhūr* (manifestation or appearance). As William Chittick explains, "Generally speaking, every name of God has loci of manifestations ... in the cosmos, some obvious and some hidden. The universe as a whole manifests all the names of God. Within the existent things is found every attribute of Being in some mode or another. Even such attributes as incomparability and unknowability that apply in a strict sense only to the Essence can be found in a relative sense among the possible things. Or again, one could say that every divine attribute is found in an absolute sense in God alone, but in a relative sense in the creatures." See *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 16. One can also refer to the various works of the famous French Orientalist, Henry Corbin for further elaboration of the term. [Tr.]
6. An incorrect understanding about the created realm is that God and His creatures are independent entities in their own right, and each perfection that the creatures have, is in effect something 'borrowed' from their Creator—but to say 'borrowed' is to say 'transferred' which means that it no longer exists at the source to the same degree as it did before the transfer. This, however, is inconceivable with regards to God, for God is Absolute and Infinite at all times, and every perfection that lies in "other than God" is in reality a manifestation of God Himself and nothing else. [Ed.]
7. The phrase "gardens beneath which rivers flow" is a reference to one of the most recurring Qur'ānic descriptions of Paradise, which has been repeated over twenty-five times in the Qur'ān (see 2:25, 3:15, 4:13, etc.). [Ed.]
8. One may wonder why nobility is compared to freedom when it comes to worship. The famous *ḥadīth*

from Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) may clarify the reason: "Truly, a group worships God out of want; such is the worship of the traders. A second group worships God out of fear; such is the worship of the slaves. Indeed, a third group worships God out of gratitude; such is the worship of the *free ones* and such is the best of worship" Since the worship of the free person occupies such a lofty rank, one may wish to compare his worship with that of a noble man. Also see the author's discussion in Session Eleven under the section: The Levels of God-wariness and nobility. [Ed.]

9. In quite a few verses, the Qurʾān describes the inhabitants of heaven as being adorned with garments of silk (See, for example, 18:31, 22:23, 35:33, 76:12). This last reference in fact appears soon after the incident regarding the noble Ahl al-Bayt and Fiḍḍah wherein God mentions their reward for feeding the poor, the orphan, and the captive for "the Face of Allah" as was described in the previous section. [Ed.]
10. The "Greater Resurrection" (*qiyāmah kubrā*) refers to the objective resurrection wherein all people will be brought together for the final judgement and questioned. This is often compared to the "lesser resurrection" (*qiyāmah sughrā*) which occurs when the human soul leaves the plane of materiality at the point of death and enters the imaginal realm. The prophetic tradition, "whoever dies, his resurrection has surely commenced" alludes to the latter. [Ed.]
11. As the author explains, the first phrase, "Immaculate is my Lord, the all-Supreme (*al-aẓīm*)" is the canonical litany usually recited in the *rukūʿ* (bowing during the canonical prayers) while the second, "Immaculate is my Lord, the most Exalted (*al-aʿlā*)" is the litany usually recited in the *sajdah* (prostration during the canonical prayers). Aside from the fact that two different names of the divine are used in each litany, the second phrase has the added component of the superlative form which is lacking in the former. [Ed.]

12. There are two possible translations for this part of the verse [35:10] discussed by Muslim grammarians and exegetes depending on how one determines the antecedents for the subjective and objective pronouns in the word *yarfaʿuhu* (lit. "it elevates it"). Either the subject is "righteous conduct" (*ʿamal al-ṣāliḥ*) and the object is "the good word" (*kalim al-ṭayyib*) in which case the translation would read: "to Him ascends the good word, and righteous conduct elevates the good word." Or the subject is God and the object is "righteous conduct" in which case one would translate it as: "to Him ascends the good word, and God elevates righteous conduct." The author intends the former interpretation to show the *essential ascending* nature of knowledge and the *supplementary assisting* nature of action. Of course, considering the author's view regarding the primacy of knowledge over action in so far as knowledge pertains to the heart and action to the body, the second interpretation would also be in line with his views since knowledge has the inherent capacity to ascend on its own while action is in need of being "uplifted" from Above. See Darwīsh in *Iʿrāb al-Qurʾān wa bayānihi* with regard to the verse in question. [Ed.]
13. The "unity of the wayfarer and the way" (*ittiḥād-e sālik wa maslak*) is one of the many extensions of the "unity of the knower and the known" (*ittiḥād-e ʿāqil wa maʿqūl*), the latter of which is particularly studied in post-Sadrian Islamic philosophy [Tr.]
14. The first chapter in Kulaynī's great compendium of *ḥadīth*, the *Usūl al-kāfī* is entitled, "The Book of Intelligence (*ʿaql*) and Ignorance (*jahl*)". The second chapter is entitled, "The Book of the Virtues of Knowledge (*ʿilm*)." From this one can understand how in the Islamic parlance, there are two forms of ignorance. The first is the customary understanding of 'ignorance' where ignorance is the lack of knowledge. It is normally used in a relative sense. So, the ignorant man (*jāhil*) relative to a particular field

of knowledge is one who simply lacks knowledge in that field. The second understanding of 'ignorance' is that which is in opposition to the intellect (*ʿaql*). In this sense, the ignorant man (*jāhil*) is one who either does not utilize his intellect or actually goes against it. One who is afflicted with this second form of ignorance is in a far deeper predicament than the first. Relating this to the topic at hand, the author is arguing that a man who possesses discursive knowledge in one or more fields may not be called "ignorant" in the first sense of the word, but in so far as this knowledge does not lead to righteous action or the nurturing of ethical virtues in his soul—which is what the true intellect calls for—he can be described as "ignorant" in the second sense of the word. [Ed.]

15. There is a difference of opinion among the grammarians regarding the exact meaning of the preposition *min* found in 22:5 (Surah Ḥajj) which precedes the word *baʿd* ("after"). Some say that it is extraneous (*ziyādah*) implying that it does not add any additional meaning to the phrase other than emphasizing the existing meaning of "so that he knows nothing *after* [having possessed] some knowledge." Others say that the preposition *min* here carries its predominant meaning of "commencing from". Hence, the verse can be roughly translated as "so that he knows nothing [and this ignorance commences and issues] *from* after [having possessed] some knowledge." In other words, the ignorance is a direct result of his knowledge and hence, issues *from* it. In light of what the respected author has mentioned above and given the context of this verse, wherein God is addressing those who doubt or deny the Resurrection, the "knowledge" of such people—since it is "cut off" from the true Object of knowledge—is doomed from the outset. This explains the use of the added preposition *min* in 22:5 which emphasizes that the source of ignorance is precisely a limited form of knowledge, and also explains why it does not appear

in 16:70 wherein God is addressing a more general audience. Refer to "Ḥarf" in Sāmirrā'ī's *Maᶜānī al-naḥw* for a more thorough discussions of the linguistic nuances contained in these two verses. [Ed.]

16. A tradition states that Muslims that enter hell will forget the name of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and who he was. After burning in its flames for five hundred years they will remember that "he was the person upon whom the Qur'ān was revealed." At this they will be forgiven and removed from punishment. [Tr.]
17. Although the part of the tradition quoted above does not mention "beneficial knowledge" it can be gleaned from the context. The tradition referred to above was narrated by the Prophet (ṣ) in a mosque in which people had gathered around an individual. He was told the individual was a profoundly learned scholar (*ᶜallāmah*). The Prophet asked, "What does 'profoundly learned scholar' mean?" The people replied, "one who is the most knowledgeable of men with regards to the genealogy of the Arabs, their battles, their history, their poetry, and their language." To this, the Prophet responded, "This form of knowledge does not harm him who is uninformed of it, nor it is *beneficial* for one who does." Thereafter, he stated: "Knowledge is only three ..." Hence, from the context, it is clear he is referring to beneficial knowledge. [Ed.]
18. The notion that the cause does not "desire" its effect is based on the following intellectual principle: "that which is high does not perform for that which is low" (*al-ᶜālī la yafᶜalu li al-sāfil*) which is discussed by Ibn Sīnā in his *al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt* on the section of the soul. [Tr.]
19. One way to understand this phrase of the Imam, "Certainly, the tongue of a believer is behind his heart; and truly, the heart of a hypocrite is behind his tongue,"—which is in line with how the author has interpreted it—is to say that the heart represents the

essential aspects of existence while the tongue represents the formal aspects. For a believer, the essence precedes the form or to state it differently, the form takes it lead from the essence; hence, his tongue is behind his heart. For a hypocrite, that which takes precedence is the form over the essence. Hence, the essence [or whatever is left of it] follows the form. In effect, his heart is behind his tongue. On the practical plane, the heart is the source of speech in both cases; the only difference is that for the believer, his heart is intact—meaning that it is in accordance with objective reality—whereas for the hypocrite, his heart has been constricted in so far as it can only see things on a material level. [Ed.]

Glossary

Akhlāq	ethical virtues
ʿalayhi al-salām	an expression that means "peace be upon him"; it appears after the name of one of the Infallibles and is abbreviated as (*ʿa*) in the text.
ʿārif	gnostic, spiritual wayfarer
ʿamal ṣāliḥ	righteous deed
ʿaql ʿamalī	practical intellect
ʿaql naẓarī	theoretical intellect
ʿaẓīm	supreme, exalted
āyāt-e tadwīnī	written signs and verses of the noble Qurʾān
āyāt-e takwīnī	existential signs pointing to God
Barzakh	barrier, veil, or isthmus; if capitalized, it refers to the Imaginal or Intermediate World—i.e., the realm between this world and the Afterlife, which acts as a halting spot for the souls after they die.
baqā	eternal
danī	base, abject, despicable
danāwah	baseness, abjectness, disgrace
dunyā	this world, lower world, mundane world
fanā	perishing
fiṭrah	innate disposition, original nature, innate intuition
furqān	discernment
ghaflah	unawareness, inattentiveness, forgetfulness, oblivion
ghayb	realm of the unseen, unknown; metaphysical; lit. absent
ḥadīth (hadith)	transmission, tradition, saying of the Prophet or the Infallibles
ḥāl	state
ḥaqq	truth, reality; the True

ḥurr (pl. *aḥrār*)	freeman
iḥsān	benevolence; virtue
ʿilm	knowledge
ʿilm ḥuḍūrī	immediate knowledge, gnostic and intuitive knowledge, knowledge by presence
ʿilm ḥuṣūlī	mediate knowledge, acquired knowledge, discursive knowledge
ʿilm shuhūdī	immediate or witnessed knowledge (by a visionary and direct apprehension of reality), mystic witnessing
insān kāmil	perfect human being
ishtirāk maʿnawī	univocally
ishtirāk lafẓī	equivocally
ittiḥād sālik wa maslak	unity / correlation between wayfarer and his spiritual provision
ittiḥād ṣifah wa mawsūf	unity / correlation between the attribute and the attributed
jahl basīṭ	simple ignorance
jahl murakkab	compounded ignorance
jāmiʿiyyah	comprehensiveness
jannah	heaven, paradise
jannah ḥissī	sensory heaven
jannah ʿaqlī	intelligible heaven
jihād	struggle; war
karāmah	nobility, honour; magnanimity; generosity;
karāmah (pl. *karāmāt*)	spiritual grace; miracle
kawn jāmiʿ	all-comprehensive being
kayfiyya nafsāniyyah	psychic quality
liqāʾ Allah	beatific vision; encounter with God
mafhūm	concept, notion; subject
maḥabbah	love
maḥbūb	beloved
maḥḍar	locus of presence
māhiyyah	essence; quiddity
malakah	habit or disposition of the soul, tendency
maʿrifah [pl. *maʿārif*]	knowledge, understanding, [esoteric] wisdom, gnosis

mashhad	locus of witnessing
maẓhar	locus of manifestation
miʿrāj	the nocturnal ascension of the Prophet (ṣ) to the heavens
muḥāsabah	taking account of one's soul
mumkin al-wujūd	contingent being
murākabah	vigilance, watching over one's soul
ṣallallahu ʿalayhī wa ālihi wa sallama	an expression that means "may God salute and send peace on him and his family"; it appears after the name of the Holy Prophet and is abbreviated as (ṣ) in the text.
ṣirāṭ mustaqīm	Straight path
shahādah	witnessing; manifest, visible realm; the seen and sensorial world
shuhūd	mystic witnessing; intuition; the visionary and direct apprehension of reality
tabarrī	aversion, disassociation
taqwā	God-consciousness, God-wariness, piety
taqwāye ʿamalī	practical God-wariness, piety
taqwāye ʿilmī	intellective God-consciousness
tawallī	inclination, association
qiyāmah kubrā	Greater Resurrection; the objective resurrection for all mankind at the end of time
qiyāmah sughrā	lesser resurrection; the subjective resurrection of each individual at the point of death
rukūʿ	the position of bowing during the ritual prayers that follows *qirāʾah*
sajdah	the position of prostrating during the ritual prayers
wajh Allah	Face of God; sake of God, pleasure of God
wājib al-wujūd	necessary in His existence, Necessary Being
walī	saint, friend [of God]
waṣf nafsī	essential quality
waṣf nisbī	relational/relative quality

wilāyah	divine authority and guardianship
ziyārah	the ritual of visiting or addressing a deceased spiritual figure, especially one
	the fourteen Infallibles (*ʿa*)

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